UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

Bridging Their Own Worlds:

How Southeast Asian American Students Persist in the University

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

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June 2016

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Bridging Their Own Worlds:

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to all of my family— for your unwavering belief in me.

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2012	*The Lao American Ethnic Economy* Department of Asian American Studies Colloquium UC Santa Barbara

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ABSTRACT

Bridging Their Own Worlds:
How Southeast Asian American Students Persist in the University

by

Malaphone Phommasa

Southeast Asian Americans have vast potential for educational advancement. Statistics reveal drastically different percentages of educational attainment when comparing the percentages of bachelor degree attainment of Southeast Asian American ethnic groups to their overall Asian American counterparts and the overall U.S. population (SEARAC, 2011), with nearly half of Cambodians, Laotian, and Hmong Americans aged 25 or older who have attended college leaving without earning an associate's or bachelor's degree (CARE, 2011). This study examined 24 Southeast Asian American students' experiences in higher education in order to understand the roots and remedies of this problem. The research questions that guided this study were: 1) What are the pathways that led Southeast Asian American students to academically rigorous universities?, 2) Who or what provides support to students, and who or what causes difficulties for students?, 3) How does the university's campus racial climate affect students' experiences at their university?, and 4) To what extent are culturally validating environments available to students at their university, and how do these environments support students' multiple worlds?

To guide this study, I adapted three theoretical perspectives: the *Bridging Multiple Worlds Model* (2002, 2011), *cultural validation framework*s, (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, Maramba, Palmer, Reyes, & Bresonis, 2013; Rendón, 1994), and *campus racial climate* frameworks (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solórzano, 2009). This study used

surveys and in-depth individual interviews with 24 Southeast Asian American undergraduate students from two public research universities in California. Students were identified as having Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, or Lao ethnic backgrounds.

Findings suggested that Southeast Asian American students gained educational and emotional support from high school outreach programs, family members, mentors, peers, their involvements in campus clubs and organizations, and campus resource centers. On the other hand, a lack of support during the college application process, their own mental roadblocks, other people, academics, finances, and feelings of loneliness, isolation, and marginalization caused difficulties on students' educational pathways. In addition to this, the findings also suggested that students at both Coral Tree University and Redwood University experienced a negative campus racial climate. Not only did the majority of students consider there to be an insufficient number of Southeast Asian American students, there was also an insufficient number of culturally familiar faculty, staff, and administrators at both universities. Also, 17 of the 24 students had experienced incidents of racism or racial microaggressions at their universities. However, culturally validating environments such as the Asian American Studies Department, ethnic clubs and organizations, the campus outreach and retention center, campus cultural centers, and the people within these spaces helped students bridge their worlds by: 1) supporting students' ethnic identity development, 2) opening lines of communication with parents, 3) developing mentoring relationships, 4) supporting students' sense of belonging, and 5) helping students develop an awareness of or take action on social issues. Despite the fact that 11 of the 24 students considered leaving their university, all 24 students chose to persist through the challenges that they encountered along their educational pathways.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Despite the fact that research on higher education persistence and retention has garnered prolific attention since the mid-1970s, there is still a vital need to continue the research with students of color. According to Maldonado and colleagues (2005), "institutions of higher education continue to face major difficulties in retaining underrepresented student populations" (p. 606). Although access to higher education has increased for all ethnic groups and increasing numbers of students have been enrolling into college right after high school, the disparities in degree attainment for minoritized[1] students remain (Carter, 2006; Kelly, LaVergne, Boone, Jr., & Boone, 2012; Museus, 2010). It has been reported that more than half of all students who enroll in higher education will not earn their bachelor's degree within six years (Museus & Quaye, 2009), but there is a much higher probability of minoritized students leaving higher education than their white peers (Carter, 2006).

Student persistence and retention remains imperative, as several scholars have noted the increasing importance of obtaining a college degree for individual and societal success in our current economic conditions (e.g. Carter, 2006; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Witkow, Gillen-O'Neel, & Fuligni, 2012). The rates of unemployment are significantly higher (two-and-a-half times greater) for Asian American and Pacific Islanders with a high school diploma or less versus Asian American and Pacific Islanders with bachelor's degrees or higher (CARE, 2010). Scholars have advocated that education is a means for social advancement, arguing that "education has a profound impact on both the individual and

[1] I adopt Harper's (2012) language of referring to "minoritized" students instead of "minority" students (literature review excluded) to acknowledge the "social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in U.S. social institutions, including colleges and universities." According to Harper (2012), "Persons are not born into minority status nor are they minoritized in every context. Instead, they are rendered minorities in particular situations and institutional environments to sustain an overrepresentation of Whiteness." (p.9).

society at large, and it is one of the surest ways to increase one's social and economic levels and overcome the barriers of poverty and deprived social conditions" (Swail et al., 2003, p. 4).

While Patton, Morelon, Whitehead, and Hossler (2006) stated that no other topic has produced more published literature than the issue of student persistence, there has been a severe lack of attention given to Asian Americans in this field (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Yeh, 2004). Museus, Maramba, Palmer, Reyes, & Bresonis (2013) attributed the void of research to the model minority stereotype; the authors argued that the aggregated data on the success of Asian American students has "led to an exclusion of Asian Americans from higher education research and discourse" (p. 2). The lack of attention provided to Asian Americans and the problem of aggregated data has led many scholars to argue that the disparities in educational attainment among Asian American ethnic groups are rarely recognized (Carter, 2006; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Museus, 2010; Yeh, 2004). Masked by these problems are the continuing educational struggles of Southeast Asian American students. As a result, the myth of Asian Americans as a model minority has prevented Southeast Asian American students from receiving the support of educational and social programs on their college campuses (Museus, 2010). To extend the body of literature on the lived experiences of Southeast Asian American students, this dissertation provides a broader understanding of the educational experiences of Southeast Asian American university students

In order to place the educational attainment levels of Southeast Asian Americans in context, it is necessary to understand the history of Southeast Asian immigration and

settlement in the United States. Prior to the statement of the problem, I begin by providing a brief history of Southeast Asian American migration.

Southeast Asian American Immigration, Settlement, and Progress

After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the U.S.-supported governments in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos fell into Communist control (North Vietnam, Pathet Lao, and Khmer Rouge respectively), the immigration of Southeast Asian refugees has been described in three waves (Bankston III & Hidalgo, 2007; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Takaki, 1998). The first wave of refugees arrived in the U.S. between 1975 and 1979. This group was comprised primarily of the elite upper-class and those who worked with the U.S. military; the majority of these migrants were Vietnamese. They were a more educated and economically equipped group upon their arrival in the United States. The second wave of refugees arrived between 1979 and 1982. These refugees were mainly family members of those who came in the first wave of migration. Like their predecessors, this group was also highly educated and economically well off in their homeland. Once Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, unprecedented numbers of refugees were admitted into the United States. The largest group of refugees arrived during the third wave from 1982 to the present. These refugees were primarily Cambodian, Hmong and Lowland Lao who were subsistence farmers with very little to no education. They lived in Thai refugee camps for many years before arriving in America. As a collective, they were the least educated and poorest among all of the refugee waves.

Upon initial arrival in the U.S., the government attempted to distribute Southeast Asian refugees across the nation to alleviate their social and political impact (Bankston III & Hidalgo, 2007). However, the vast majority of each Southeast Asian ethnic group settled or

resettled in California to be near family or larger concentrations of coethnics, and sizeable ethnic enclaves have also been established in Texas, Minnesota, and Washington (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao refugees were primarily resettled in low-income, urban neighborhoods. In addition to the violence they had seen and experienced in their homeland, many refugees witnessed and were victims of violence in their American neighborhoods (Bankston III & Hidalgo, 2007).

Illustrated in Table 1, except for Vietnamese Americans, over half of the Cambodian[2], Hmong, and Laotian[3] American population are either second generation or beyond. Taking into consideration that the mass migration of Southeast Asians occurred only after the late 1970s and 1980s, this indicates a very large population of Southeast Asian Americans who are of schooling age or have children who are entering the school system. This points to a greater need of ensuring that more Southeast Asian Americans are earning college degrees and gaining lucrative employment as adults. According to the latest census data, Southeast Asian Americans aged 16 and over who are employed are disproportionately concentrated in the "construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair occupations" as compared to the overall Asian American population and the overall U.S. population (Table 2). Although they still have a significantly higher percentage of people employed in the aforementioned sector, Vietnamese Americans are more likely to be employed in "service occupations" or "management, professional, and related occupations" than their Southeast Asian counterparts (SEARAC, 2011).

[2] I alternate between referring to Cambodian American students as "Cambodian" and "Khmer" (the predominant ethnic group in Cambodia) in this dissertation, since several students also identified as Khmer.
[3] Similarly, I use "Lao" (the predominant ethnic group in Laos) to refer to the Laotian students in this study.

Table 1
Total Population and Population Born in the U.S. by Southeast Asian American Ethnic Group

	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Hmong	Laotian
Total Population	1,737,433	276,667	260,073	232,130
Born in the U.S.	638,522	140,886	154,391	119,944
Residing in CA	647,589	102,317	91,224	69,303

*Note: Data obtained from SEARAC 2011 Statistical Profile.

Table 2
Poverty Status (Individual Persons) and Employment in the U.S.

	U.S. Overall	Asian Overall	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Hmong	Laotian
Poverty Status	15.3	12.4%	15.2%	21.6%	27.3%	16.4%
Occupation						
Management, professional, and related	35.9%	47.3%	30.2%	22.3%	18.9%	21.5%
Sales and office	18.0%	17.3%	30.4%	19.2%	20.1%	15.2%
Construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair	11.9%	9.5%	17.6%	26.9%	28.8%	35.4%

*Note: Data obtained from SEARAC 2011 Statistical Profile.

With these employment patterns, it is not surprising that the poverty rates of Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian Americans are higher than the overall U.S. population, and drastically higher for Cambodian and Hmong Americans. Furthermore, Southeast Asian Americans were three to five times more likely to be unemployed than other Asian American ethnic groups (CARE, 2010). Considering that the rates of unemployment are significantly higher (two-and-a-half times greater) for Asian American and Pacific Islanders with a high school

diploma or less versus Asian American and Pacific Islanders with bachelor's degrees or higher (CARE 2010), it is vital to educate this young Southeast Asian American community.

Statement of the Problem

In addition to being in a position of economic disadvantage, Southeast Asian Americans also have vast potential for educational advancement. When comparing the percentages of bachelor degree attainment of Southeast Asian American ethnic groups to their overall Asian American counterparts and the overall U.S. population, the statistics reveal drastically different percentages of educational attainment (SEARAC, 2011). As seen in Table 3, Southeast Asian Americans, as an aggregate, are trailing far behind the overall U.S. population and the overall Asian American population in bachelor degree attainment. The statistics are even more startling when examining the degree attainment rates of each Southeast Asian American ethnic group. Although Vietnamese Americans are achieving at rates nearly comparable to the overall U.S. population, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong Americans continue to have alarmingly low rates of bachelor degree attainment. The differences in achievement between Vietnamese Americans and other Southeast Asian American ethnic groups have been attributed to their differences in immigration patterns and pre-migration group status, which was discussed in the previous section (Feliciano, 2006; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Although it is encouraging to see that Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong Americans have nearly doubled their percentages of degree attainment in one decade, it cannot be refuted that these numbers are still quite low. In fact, Portes and Rumbaut (2006) have declared that children of Laotian and Cambodian refugees, as well as children of Mexican immigrants, are at the "greatest educational disadvantage" (p.276) in Southern California. These problematic figures signal a need to understand why

the bachelor degree attainment of Southeast Asian Americans continue to stagnate despite the number of decades and the expanding generations of these ethnic groups living in the United States.

Table 3
Bachelor Degree Attainment of People Aged 25 and Older in the United States

Census Year	Overall U.S. Population	Asian Americans	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Laotian	Hmong
2000	24.4%	46.5%	19.5%	9.1%	7.6%	7.4%
2010	28.2%	48.9%	25.5%	18.0%	13.2%	14.8%

*Note: The 2004 SEARAC Statistical Profile measured Asian American educational attainment by including Asian American groups with a population over 1 million. These ethnic groups included Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and Korean. The 2011 SEARAC Southeast Asian Americans at a Glance report did not specify which ethnic groups were included in their percentage of "Asian Overall."

While the numbers reveal a very limited number of Southeast Asian Americans earning bachelor's degrees, research also reveals that there are significant numbers of Southeast Asian Americans who are entering higher education institutions but not earning terminal degrees (CARE, 2011). As can be seen in Table 4, large proportions of Southeast Asian Americans are attending college but not earning terminal degrees. Nearly half of Cambodians, Laotian, and Hmong Americans aged 25 or older who have attended college left without earning an associate's or bachelor's degree. The data did not reveal whether these students left a two-year or a four-year institution. However, research has shown that Southeast Asian American students are more likely to drop out of high school and more likely to be enrolled at community colleges or less selective colleges (CARE 2011, 2013). These figures are cause for alarm to understand why so many Southeast Asian American students start but never graduate from either a community college or a four-year institution.

While this dissertation expands the body of research on Southeast Asian American college student persistence and retention, an investigation into the experiences of both community college and four-year college students was beyond the scope of this study.

Table 4
Educational Attainment for Southeast Asian American College Attendees (Aged 25 or older), 2006-2008

	Some College, No Degree	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Advanced Degree
Vietnamese	33.7%	15.7%	34.3%	16.3%
Cambodian	42.9%	20.7%	28.8%	7.6%
Laotian	46.5%	19.7%	26.6%	7.2%
Hmong	47.5%	22.1%	25.2%	5.1%

*Note: 2011 CARE (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education) report--data taken from the American Community Survey.

This dissertation examined the educational experiences of Southeast Asian American students prior to coming to the university and their experiences in the university in order to understand the factors that were supporting and challenging students' college persistence and retention. To accomplish this, the study examined the multiple worlds that students were part of and the role each of these worlds play in their pathway to college and their college experience. I also analyzed how students navigated and negotiated their relationships within each world. Extending beyond individual level factors, institutional level factors such as the effects of campus racial climate on students' academic and social experiences were also a focus of this dissertation. Prior to discussing further details of this study, I discuss the literature that situates this dissertation.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter examines the existing literature related to the education of Southeast Asian Americans students as well as much of the literature examining student persistence and retention. The first section discusses the perceptions and stereotypes that have created contrasting views of Southeast Asian American students. Next, I discuss the limited quantity of literature on the higher education experiences of Southeast Asian Americans. Here, I also discuss the work of Chhuon and his colleagues (2008, 2010) on Cambodian American college students, Lee (1997) and Vue's research (2013) on Hmong American college students, and my own research with Lao Americans (Phommasa, 2012, 2015). In the following sections, I examine some of the theories and literature that focused specifically on the college persistence and retention of minoritized students, including Southeast Asian Americans. Next, I discuss literature that has highlighted institutional components that have aided in the retention of students of color. After, I examine the literature on campus racial climate and its effects on students of color. Next, I highlight the literature on campus-based programs that often serve as counter-spaces to negative campus racial climates and are important spaces for students of color. I conclude this literature review by providing a summary of the key findings that will aid in the understanding of this dissertation.

Perceptions of Southeast Asian American Students in Education

The most prominent discussion about Southeast Asian American students is that they are placed within an educational paradox of contrasting perceptions of students as overachieving Asian Americans or as underachieving dropouts and delinquents (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Um, 2003). Born in the 1960s, the model minority myth has become the most

prevalent stereotype to plague Asian Americans (Museus, 2014). This myth posits that Asian Americans are superior racial minority due to their academic and economic success (Museus, 2014; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Scholars have argued that this myth places dangerous pressures on Asian American students to succeed and overachieve academically without acknowledging that Asian American students may also experience psychological issues (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Museus, 2014). Furthermore, not only does this myth mask the educational and psychological struggles of Asian American students, it has also been used to denigrate other minoritized groups who have not been able to achieve parallel success. On the opposite end of the model minority stereotype, Southeast Asian American students have also been plagued by what Museus (2014) terms the "deviant minority stereotype." This stereotype racializes Southeast Asian Americans as "dropouts, gang members, and welfare sponges" (p.100). These contrasting views of Southeast Asian American students can have detrimental effects on their educational experiences. Students may feel immense pressure to either conform to these stereotypes or overcompensate in order to counter these stereotypes. Despite the fact that these perceptions have continued to plague Southeast Asian American students, there has been a very few studies that have actually tried to understand students' educational and lived experiences. The following section examines some of the existing literature on the experiences of Southeast Asian American students in higher education.

Higher Education Experiences of Southeast Asian American Students

Scholars who focus on Asian American and Southeast Asian American educational issues continue to argue that there is a severe dearth of research on understanding Asian American students' experiences (Museus & Chang, 2009; Suyemoto, Kim, Tanabe, Tawa, & Day, 2009). Attributing this inattention to the perceptions of Asian American academic

success and the model minority myth, several scholars argue that these stereotypes of Asian American students have led many educators to disregard and remain unaware of certain Asian American groups' educational struggles (Carter, 2006; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Museus, 2010; Teranishi, 2002; Yeh, 2004). Therefore, there are a steadily growing, but extremely limited number of research articles focusing on the experiences of Southeast Asian American students (e.g., Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Chhuon, Hudley, Brenner, & Macias, 2010; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2014; Museus, Maramba, Palmer, Reyes, & Bresonis, 2013; Phommasa, 2015; Vue, 2013). This section highlights some of the studies that focused specifically on the experiences of Southeast Asian Americans in higher education.

Based on findings from the first national Southeast Asian Youth Summit at UC Berkeley in 2000, Um (2003) published one of the first papers that provided detailed experiences of Southeast Asian American high school and college students. Summit participants included high school students, undergraduate and graduate students, young professionals, practitioners, advocates, and policy makers. Surveys were also administered to 106 college students in California and Massachusetts. Students identified nine barriers to the educational advancement of Southeast Asian American students. First, students believed they had little to no access to information about higher education or the preparation for higher education. Furthermore, students were not aware and did not know how to access resources that would provide them with the information they needed. Second, students felt that they had limited access to support, both academically and emotionally. Of the 106 survey respondents, 31% who were currently attending a four-year institution and 36% who were attending a junior college felt that they were underprepared for college. According to Um, this academic underpreparation is one of the main reasons why Southeast Asian American

students are disproportionately enrolled in community colleges after high school. The third barrier identified by students were the stereotypes and low expectations held by educators that led to a disregard of their academic needs. These students were victims of the "deviant minority stereotype" that plague Southeast Asian American students. The fourth barrier was a lack of paraprofessionals and support staff that would be able to aid students. Fifth, students felt that they had limited access to community resources. Um labeled them as an "economically vulnerable population" (p.10) that lacked resources both in the home and community. Additionally, the economic constraints felt by these families meant that many students had to balance academic responsibilities with familial obligations. The sixth barrier to educational advancement was racism, exhibited by individuals, within the educational institution, or in society. Students at this summit felt that a discussion about racism was central to understanding their educational experiences. Of the 106 college students who responded to the survey, 45% reported having experienced a form of racism. Of this population, 44% of males and 32% of females reported that they had experienced a form of racism from their teachers or counselors. The seventh barrier discussed by students was the lack of language and history courses that reflected their heritage, a lack of active role models, and the absence of Southeast Asian educators. This resulted in many students feeling alienated and marginalized on their college campuses. Students identified the eighth barrier as cultural constraints, and more specifically, negotiating the intergenerational gap between them and their parents. Many students discussed difficulties of handling the age and gender hierarchies in their families. Lastly, economic hardship was considered one of the key impediments to Southeast Asians access and retention in higher education. Thirty six percent of survey respondents reported that financial constraints served as the largest barrier to their

academic pursuits. Not only were students struggling to fund their education, many students also felt obligated to help their families financially. By identifying these barriers to Southeast Asian American educational advancement, Um argued for more institutions to acknowledge these issues affecting the retention of Southeast Asian American students and establish more outreach and retention programs to help this underserved student population.

Um's (2003) paper was seminal in identifying the barriers and needs of Southeast Asian American college students. By including the voices of a variety of stakeholders who were dedicated to Southeast Asian American students' success, Um was able to provide a starting point for researchers to further explore these issues in more depth. As subsequent research on this population has revealed that educational advancement continues to be a struggle for Southeast Asian American students, this dissertation addressed several of the issues brought to attention by Um's paper.

Scholars have more recently examined the impact of cultural validation and social capital on the college experiences of Southeast Asian American college students (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Both studies drew from a sample of 34 students across five public colleges and universities across the country. Participants included 13 Vietnamese students, 9 Cambodian students, 5 Hmong students, 3 Laotian students, and 4 multiethnic Southeast Asian American students. Through the lens of cultural validation, defined by Rendón (1994) as "recognizing, respecting, and appreciating students as well as their families and communities," Maramba and Palmer (2014) sought to understand the role of culture in supporting the success of Southeast Asian American college students (p. 517). Four themes emerged from their data: 1) the importance of having access to cultural knowledge, 2) the importance of cultural familiarity and having access to people from similar

backgrounds, 3) the importance of cultural expression, and 4) the importance of cultural advocacy and having opportunities to give back to their community. Using the lens of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), Palmer and Maramba (2015) concluded that "caring agents" (family, counselors and teachers, and peers) and "supportive organizations and student services" were important factors in Southeast Asian American college student success. This dissertation draws on the cultural validation framework as defined by Rendón and expanded on by Maramba and Palmer (2014) to provide a more in-depth examination on the lived experiences of Southeast Asian American university students.

The work by Um (2003), Maramba and Palmer (2014), and Palmer and Maramba (2015) provided valuable insight into the issues that challenge Southeast Asian American students' success as well as the various modes of support for students. However, their studies were not context specific; Um's (2003) survey drew from college students in California and Massachusetts, while Maramba and Palmer (2014) and Palmer and Maramba's (2015) studies drew 34 students from 5 different colleges and universities across the country. By way of contrast, this study was designed to examine Southeast Asian American students in only two universities in order to situate their experiences within the context of their institutions.

The following subsections examine literature that has focused on the experiences of specific Southeast Asian ethnic groups in higher education. Interestingly, I could not find research that focused solely on understanding the experiences of Vietnamese American college students after an extensive search. However, there have been several studies examining the academic achievement of Vietnamese American youth (e.g., Bankston III, Caldas, & Zhou, 1997; Feliciano, 2006; Saito, 2002). Therefore, I hypothesize that due to the fact that Vietnamese Americans are achieving at rates higher than their Southeast Asian

American counterparts and closer to the overall U.S. population (refer to Table 3) that scholars have not been compelled to focus on this college student population.

Cambodian Americans. Focusing on the academic experiences of Cambodian Americans, Chhuon and Hudley's (2008) study was framed by Tinto's (1993) theory of student persistence and departure as well as the critiques against Tinto's argument for student academic and social integration. Their study was guided by the following research question: What experiences did Cambodian American college students believe affected their social and academic adjustment at the university? (p. 17). The researchers interviewed 10 Cambodian American students (six females and four males) from a public research university in southern California. Five students were first-generation students, and the other five were second-generation students; nine of the 10 students were first-generation college attendees.

Chhuon and Hudley (2008) found several factors that supported and challenged students' adjustment to the university. Upon their arrival at the university, participants expressed experiencing struggles to find support on the campus. However, these Cambodian American students eventually found sources of support throughout the campus setting. These findings were organized into four themes: 1) the Educational Opportunity Program, 2) positive faculty contact, 3) the Cambodian Club, and 4) social and emotional support from their home communities. The Educational Opportunity Program was found to be a strong method of support for the students. The Program offers services such as individual mentoring, academic advising, and career counseling. Eight of the 10 students considered the Educational Opportunity Program as "especially important for their graduation goals" (p. 20). In addition, students were supported by positive interactions with faculty members and teaching assistants. Students gained confidence in their abilities from positive interactions

with faculty members. At the same time, "professors at the university who did not seem to care about their students were seen as a barrier to achieving academic success" (p. 21). Third, the Cambodian Club and its members served as a method of academic and emotional/social support for these students. Students were able to gain empathy from members regarding their academic and social adjustment, as well as gain a sense of pride in their ethnic identity. Having students to share the campus experience with validated students' cultural heritage and allowed to them gain a greater sense of belonging to the campus. Lastly, these Cambodian American students were able to turn to their family and peers from home when they felt they could not relate to their peers at the university. Members of the home community were valuable supporters and motivators for success. This finding counters Tinto's (1993) argument for students' need to separate from past communities.

Chhuon and Hudley's (2008) qualitative study has greatly contributed to the understanding of factors supporting Cambodian American students' adjustment and persistence in college, which also offers further understanding of Southeast Asian American students' persistence and retention. Students' voices lend further argument to the importance of institutional support and efforts to support the persistence of students of color. Targeted support programs, such as the Educational Opportunity program, were seen as crucial to these students' persistence and academic success. Additionally, student-led programs such as the Cambodian Club provided students with academic, social, and emotional support. The majority of research focusing on campus organizations' role in student retention focus on those formally established entities; however, the findings from this study revealed the value of informal student clubs for students' academic and social adjustment to the university.

In a subsequent study, Chhuon, Hudley, Brenner, and Macias (2010), examined the multiple worlds of Cambodian American university students and their transition to the university. Using Phelan and colleagues' (1998) multiple worlds model, these researchers sought to find out: 1) How successful Cambodian American students interpreted values from their multiple worlds in relation to their paths in the university, 2) What features of their different worlds Cambodian American students perceived as supportive for transitioning between these contexts, and 3) How did these Cambodian American students interpret and manage the perceived values and expectations of family, peer, and school worlds in a manner that allowed them to achieve academically in high school to enter the university. Phelan's multiple worlds model included a typology that includes 6 patterns to describe students' movements across their multiple worlds. Type I describes students whose home, school, and peer cultures are very much aligned, and is more often descriptive of white, middle- to upper-class students. Students in Type II learn how to negotiate the values in the different worlds they belong to. Type III, IV, and V, according to Chhuon and his colleagues, describes students who are unsuccessful negotiating the values in their different worlds and are struggling academically. Students in Type VI believe their worlds have very different values, but they have found support to aid in their transitions.

Chhuon and his colleagues interviewed 10 successful Cambodian American students from the University of California, six females and four males. They found that both families and students were more likely to fit the Type II and Type VI patterns of Phelan's model. In answering their first research question, Chhuon and colleagues found that students' duties to their families was the most salient value among these Cambodian American students. These students felt that it was their obligation to protect their family's image, serve as a role model

for younger family members, and serve as linguistic and cultural interpreters for their immigrant parents. In answer to their second question, researchers found that students' families provided students with the most support, even if it could not take the form of academic help. Instead, their families provided them with copious amounts of moral and social support. In answer to their third research question, Chhuon and his colleagues found that the positive support of peers, teachers, and academic programs were instrumental in easing the transition to the university. For example, academic programs were able to provide students with academic mentors that they could not find in their own families, and some programs took students on university tours that they might not have been able to coordinate on their own.

Chhuon and his colleagues' (2008, 2010) work was pivotal in describing the academic experiences of Cambodian American students. Prior to these studies, very little was understood about how Cambodian American students navigated the academic pipeline while negotiating their roles in the multiple worlds they belonged to. Similarly, this dissertation used a multiple worlds framework that builds on Phelan and colleagues' (1998) work to understand the how Southeast Asian American students navigated their path to the university and how they continue to negotiate their multiple worlds while in college (Cooper, 2011).

Hmong Americans. Focusing on Hmong American women, Lee (1997) debunked the argument that cultural differences were the sole explanation of women's low levels of educational enrollment and achievement. Instead, Lee argued that structural barriers, such as economic and racial barriers, also need to be considered when examining the college persistence and degree attainment of Hmong American women. Several scholars who had previously examined Hmong American women often attributed their lack of educational

success to cultural discrepancies between Hmong culture and American culture (Lee, 1997). Hmong females were expected to marry young and become mothers, even if this meant dropping out of school. However, Lee argued that these cultural explanations created a dichotomous "private" and "public" sphere, which displaced any blame that could be due to structural barriers to Hmong American women's achievement. Moreover, Lee asserted that this argument assumed that Hmong culture was "static and unchanging," while ignoring the history and transformation of their migration as refugees to the U.S. (p.804). Therefore, Lee's study sought to answer the following questions: 1) What motivates some Hmong American women to pursue higher education?, 2) What obstacles do they face in this pursuit?, 3) How are these women transforming Hmong culture, and 4) How are their families responding to their changing roles and expectations of women?

Lee (1997) interviewed 21 first generation Hmong American women between the ages of 18-32 years old who were either pursuing or had completed their four-year degrees. Through in-depth interviews with these women, Lee found that these women were motivated to pursue higher education due to economic forces, a desire for independence, and gender equity. These women felt that Hmong culture was in the process of evolving, and these women considered themselves as leaders in this process since they were the first generation to attend college. However, this was not without challenges. Many Hmong elders were critical of the fact that these women were challenging traditional gender hierarchies. These women reported that the pressures to marry young and bear children were the largest obstacles to Hmong American women pursuing higher education. Yet, these cultural struggles were not the only barriers affecting Hmong American women; structural factors, such as racism and economic changes, also created obstacles in their educational

achievement. Several of the women reported being victims of racist remarks and taunts, such as being labeled as "backwards" and being welfare dependents. Furthermore, the welfare reform occurring in the 90s was predicted to have major impact on the Hmong American community. With the very large numbers of newly arrived Hmong American families relying on public assistance, the new welfare reform aimed at moving families off public assistance as quickly as possible and was predicted to have a profound effect on the economic statuses of many Hmong American families. Despite the presence of both cultural and structural barriers in their educational pursuits, these Hmong American women were motivated to persist and become successful graduates from four-year institutions.

A more recent study, Vue's (2013) qualitative study examined Hmong American college students' experiences through identity formation and identity salience. Vue was interested in the salience of Hmong ethnic identity and how their other social identities, such as gender and racial identities, informed the meaning of students' ethnic identity. Individual interviews were conducted with 13 Hmong students at West Coast University, a large public university where Asian American and Pacific Islanders comprised 36% of the total undergraduate population—more than any other race. Vue's study yielded several interesting findings. Despite the fact that Asian Americans were the predominant racial group at West Coast University, Hmong American students reported feeling invisible and misunderstood; their Hmong identity was more salient than identifying as Asian American. Students also felt there was a strong need for culturally relevant curriculum and courses on Hmong culture and history; the lack of such classes made it difficult for some Hmong American students to feel culturally validated on campus or they encountered difficulties negotiating their Hmong and American identities. Where students were able to develop connections with course material

was in Asian American Studies courses. While these courses were culturally relevant, some students still expressed that the curriculum did not fully capture the experiences of Hmong Americans. Several students had also planned to study or had studied abroad in Thailand in order to find a connection with their roots or complete a journey that they thought was necessary for their education. Another finding was that students' ethnic identity was salient in the development of their goals and aspirations, their interpersonal interests, and their family commitments. Students' motivations to persist were not just for themselves, but also for their families and their communities. The last finding of Vue's study highlighted the importance of the Hmong Student Association (HSA) as a place that allowed Hmong American students to express their identities. Through the HSA, students were able to connect with others who would share their experiences as college students and as Hmong Americans.

Vue's (2013) study on Hmong American college students' identities revealed several significant findings regarding the educational experiences of Hmong American students. Apparent in Vue's study was the recurring desire for college institutions to create more culturally validating campus environments. Despite the number of Asian American and Pacific Islander students at their university, Hmong American students also felt a strong desire for an increased number of coethnics. The compounding factors of feeling isolated, misunderstood, and the dissatisfaction with the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy could potentially have negative consequences on students' educational achievements. The findings in Vue's (2013) study continue to echo some of the educational barriers for Southeast Asian American students that were highlighted in Um's (2003) paper.

Laotian Americans. In my own master's research, I examined the influences on the educational and occupational aspirations of second generation Lao American college students (Phommasa, 2012). Additionally, I interviewed both students and their refugee parents to understand the influences that parents and their immigration history had on their children's aspirations. Similar to the findings in Chhuon and his colleagues' (2010) study, I found that community members, school and educators, friends and significant others, family members, and parents all had significant influence on the development of students' aspirations. Furthermore, parents' immigration stories, students' guilt of financial dependence, and students' desires for financial stability all contributed to why parents were found to be the most influential on students' aspirations as compared to the other people in students' lives (Phommasa, 2015). Aside from this study, I was not able to find any other published studies that focused on the educational experiences of Lao American college students.

The studies by Chhuon and Hudley (2008), Chhuon and colleagues (2010), Lee (1997), Vue (2013), and Phommasa (2012, 2015) all focused on students' current experiences in higher education. Their studies also emphasized the benefits of cultural validation in the form of peers, campus organizations, campus programs, and institutional agents, as well as emphasizing the continued importance of students' families and home communities during their college education. This study builds on this valuable body of literature by understanding students' pathways to the university and how they made the decisions that brought them into their current university. As will be discussed later in this chapter, researchers have also yet to examine how Southeast Asian American students experience the campus racial climate at their institutions.

While I have chosen to highlight some of the very few studies that have examined the experiences of Southeast Asian American ethnic groups in this section, the following sections of this literature review will examine the issues in this dissertation by focusing on research that have been conducted on other communities of color.

Persistence and Retention of Minoritized Students in Higher Education

As previously discussed in the introduction, there have been a multitude of studies that have aimed to improve the rates of persistence and retention of minoritized students in higher education. I begin this section by discussing Tinto's (1975) highly contested theory of student departure and continue with a discussion of how research has since progressed on understanding minoritized student retention.

Tinto's theory of student departure. Tinto's seminal paper, "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research," (1975) introduced a theoretical model that explained the longitudinal processes of interactions between individuals and their college institutions that resulted in some students dropping out of school. Rooted in Durkheim's (1961) theory of suicide, students' lack of academic and social integration into an institution led to a decrease in the level of goal and institutional commitments, and thereby increasing their chances of leaving. Tinto's theory suggested all students' need for conformity into the mainstream culture. This notion of academic and social integration has drawn a considerable amount of criticism since the development of this model (e.g., Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendón et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992; Tierney, 2000). Several scholars have argued that this model is problematic for racial and ethnic minorities (Tierney, 1992; Rendón et al., 2000). Tierney (1992) argued that "models of integration have the effect of merely inserting minorities into a dominant cultural frame of reference that is transmitted within

dominant cultural forms, leaving invisible hierarchies intact" (p. 611). Other scholars criticized that Tinto neglected the agency of students to be able to navigate multiple contexts (Rendón et al., 2000)

Alternative theories for the retention of minoritized students. Tierney (1992) offered an alternative multicultural framework to Tinto's (1975) theory for studying student retention. Using 200 interviews in a two-year case study of Native Americans on college campuses, Tierney (1992) argued that an integrationist perspective labeled Native American students as the problem, neglecting the institutional racism that was embedded in the colleges and universities. Instead, Tierney advocated that we "conceive of universities as multicultural entities where difference is highlighted and celebrated" (p. 604). In essence, he advocated for more culturally responsive methods of working on the persistence of racial and ethnic minority students, departing from a social integrationist model "toward a framework of emancipation and empowerment" (p. 616).

Following his initial multicultural framework for studying minoritized students' retention, Tierney (2000) offered a cultural model that outlined how institutions could restructure their cultures in order to support the persistence of students who were most at-risk of leaving college. Prior to understanding this cultural model, Tierney argued that we must understand our role in the "cultural construction" of dropouts and we must "learn that culture exists through powerful definitions that enable some and disable others" (p. 215). Tierney aimed to develop a framework where identity negotiation was central to academic success. The model contains five components. The first component explains that culture and power are developed by multiple individuals and groups and the way they function. Therefore, institutions should support and affirm these individual identities. Second, Tierney argued that

schools could affirm students' identities by creating connections across home, communities, and schools. Third, Tierney argued for local definitions of identity, meaning institutions must understand students' local contexts in order to empower them. Fourth, Tierney called for educators to choose challenge over remediation when working with students who are labeled "at-risk," by not lowering expectations of the students. The last component calls for institutions to provide academic support with respect to where students are in their academic levels and the backgrounds they come from. This framework was developed to better serve low-income and minoritized students. However, Tierney identified students with higher risk as "low income, urban, black, and Hispanic youth," (p.213) excluding Asian American and Southeast Asian American students.

Similarly, Rendón and colleagues (2000) called upon scholars to consider deAnda's (1984) notion of "dual socialization"—where individuals are able to operate as a member in their old and new cultures. They argued that this has been the case for Americans who have been able to maintain their ethnic identity while living in the dominant culture, and studies show that this has been the case for some students attending institutions of higher education. Connections to students' past communities are important, as they have been found to positively affect student persistence in college (Rendón et al., 2000). As can be seen from Rendón and colleagues argument, many scholars continue to see Tinto's model as an integrationist model, despite his claims that membership did not imply conformity.

In light of the criticisms of Tinto's model, Rendón and her colleagues acknowledged that researchers began studying student retention prior to there being a "critical mass" of minorities in higher education. The problem is that scholars have continued to conduct studies on student retention that do not challenge the traditional assumptions and paradigms

"that are grounded or developed from studies based on full-time, traditional-age, residential, middle-class, white, male students" that would not provide a comprehensive view of the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students (Rendón et al., 2000, p. 142). In order to take theories on student retention to a higher level and challenge these traditional paradigms, Rendón and her colleagues (2000) argued that "it is quite possible that a totally new theory is needed to take Tinto's theory to a different level" (p. 149).

In order to take student retention theory to a higher level, Rendón and colleagues (2000) advocated for drawing knowledge from other disciplines. The example the researchers focused on was Hurtado's (1997) model of social engagement developed from a social psychology perspective. The social engagement model takes into consideration gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality when studying how groups are modified when coming into contact with each other. Additionally, Rendón and her colleagues advocated for more use of qualitative methods, which would allow students to define and elaborate on who or what was affecting their educational experiences. These variables could then be tested using quantitative methods. The authors argued that scholars should not work in isolation, but be open to sharing ideas with other researchers; of most importance is that colleges and universities would be able to use these theories to develop and transform the academic and social services provided to students.

Cultural and intercultural perspectives on the retention of minoritized student populations. Expanding on Tierney's (1992) work, Kuh and Love (2000) offered eight cultural propositions to view student departure. The purpose was to view student departure as a sociocultural phenomenon and not as an individual, psychological experience (Tierney, 1992). When viewing higher education institutions from a cultural perspective, the

"interactions between people influence and subsequently change both the students and the larger institutional environments and subenvironments" (p. 198). While it is an individual decision to leave college, Kuh and Love argued that cultural forces shape the individual's decision to leave. The first proposition is that the college experience is mediated through a students' cultural meaning-making system. Students' meaning-making systems are influenced by their home cultures prior to entering college. Proposition two states that students' culture of origin mediates the importance students' attach to attending college and earning a degree. Third, understanding students' cultures of origin is necessary to understand students' abilities to successfully navigate the school's cultural environment. The fourth proposition states that the distance between students' cultures of origin and cultures of immersion is inversely related to the probability of persistence. Proposition five states that students whose culture of origin is a longer distance from the culture of immersion must either acclimate to the dominant culture or find enclaves within the campus. Sixth, the more time students' spend in their cultures of origin each year, the more cultural stress they experience and their chances of persisting decreases. Proposition seven indicates that the likelihood of student persistence is related to the degree of sociocultural connections students have with their academic program and social groups. Lastly, proposition eight states that students who belong to the enclaves on campus are more likely to persist, and they have a more likely chance of persisting if these cultures value academic achievement.

Expanding on Kuh and Love's (2000) work, Museus and Quaye (2009) conducted an empirical study on the experiences of students of color to develop a new intercultural framework for minoritized student persistence. They also considered it necessary to understand the concepts of "cultural integrity" from Tierney (1992) and the role of cultural

agents derived from various scholars (e.g., Bourdieu, 1986). Museus and Quaye (2009) defined "intercultural" as the "interaction among multiple cultures," (p.69) and therefore, the framework refers to the interactions between students' cultures of origin and cultures of immersion as termed by Kuh and Love (2000). Museus and Quaye (2009) interviewed 30 students of color (12 Asian, 12 Black, and 6 Latina/o) from a large rural public research university where students of color comprised only 15% of the student body. There were several implications from Museus and Quaye's study. First, the researchers highlighted the importance of institutions understanding their students' cultural backgrounds, and the role of individual cultural agents who help students feel accepted at the institution. As part of this argument, Museus and Quaye emphasized the importance of having diverse faculty and staff members that students can identify with. Additionally, their findings point to the necessity of supporting cultural enclaves where students of color can feel a sense of belonging. Lastly, Museus and Quaye underscored the value of capitalizing on student voices, meaning researchers and policymakers concerned with student retention should listen to the experiences shared by students.

Continuing issues in the retention of minoritized student populations. Both McNairy (1996) and Carter's (2006) work reviewed literature on the persistence and retention of students of color. Despite Carter's paper being published a decade after McNairy's, several issues in minoritized student persistence and retention remained. McNairy's (1996) research deemed the disparity in retention rates of students of color to be the main culpability of ineffective efforts by primarily white institutions (PWIs). The author termed these strategies as "retention traps," and listed four traps which institutions are guilty of. First, schools view students as a monolithic group, and fail to take into account the

variability in the characteristics of their student population. The second trap suggested that traditional retention strategies employed by schools have focused on "fixing" the student rather than assuming institutional responsibility. Third, McNairy argued that is a lack of institutional commitment to the issue of minoritized student retention. Lastly, institutions have not made serious efforts to create a campus climate that supports and values multicultural and multiracial diversity. In addition to these traps, McNairy also discussed several student and institutional factors that educators need to understand, play a role in student retention. The emphasis in McNairy's paper was the need for institutions to focus on adapting their environments as well as focusing on the student.

Carter's (2006) review of literature on the persistence of students of color revealed that the similar problems as discussed by McNairy (1996) continue to persist. However, Carter addressed additional key areas in which to understand minoritized student persistence: academic preparation, adequate financial aid, and strong support networks in college. Additionally, Carter also emphasized the importance of the role of higher education institutions in creating programs that are suitable for diverse students. As Carter argued, "Finding best practices for all students may not be serving all students" (p. 42). A commonality running across studies on minoritized student retention has been the emphasis on the role of the institution. Both of these scholars argued that higher education institutions need to hold themselves more accountable for playing a role in minoritized student retention. The majority of higher education institutions continue to operate in alignment with the dominant culture, marginalizing the diverse students attending those schools. In the next section, I focus on literature that has examined the persistence and retention of Southeast Asian American students.

Southeast Asian American student persistence and retention. Few scholars addressing the issue of minority student retention have considered the unique position Southeast Asian American students hold in comparison to their other Asian American counterparts. Since Asian Americans have historically been left out of studies on minoritized student retention due to their perceived academic success as an aggregate group, very few researchers have addressed the needs of Southeast Asian American students (Carter, 2006; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Museus, 2010; Yeh, 2004). Although there have been previous studies examining Southeast Asian refugees (Kiang, 2002, 2009), this section highlights Yeh's (2004) and Museus and colleague's (2013) work analyzing the challenges influencing the persistence and retention among Southeast Asian American college students.

According to Yeh (2004), "Research on Southeast Asian college students is quite sparse, presumably because so few of them enroll in higher educational institutions" (p. 83). In this review of literature, Yeh identified the challenges Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students faced on their persistence and retention. These challenges were divided as individual/contextual factors and institutional factors. Individual/contextual factors included academic underpreparation, first generation status, language/ESL issues, low-income background, family demands, and cultural adjustment. Institutional/environmental factors included marginalization on campus, racism/discrimination on campus, cultural barriers, model minority stereotype, and citizenship status and financial aid. Many of these issues identified as challenges for Southeast Asian American persistence and retention are the same barriers identified by students in Um's (2003) paper. There is a clear pattern that has developed showcasing the needs of Southeast Asian American students and many of these needs require the aid of and change within institutional structures.

Museus, Maramba, Palmer, Reyes, and Bresonis (2013) developed an explanatory model of Southeast Asian American (SEAA) college student success using grounded theory. As the first qualitative study that sought to understand the educational trajectories of Southeast Asian American undergraduate students, the researchers tried to answer: What cultural factors shape the educational trajectories of Southeast Asian American college students? Additional questions that guided the study included: 1) What cultural factors promote educational success among SEAA students? 2) What cultural factors hinder the educational success of SEAA? and 3) How do SEAA college students experience those factors? Using these guiding questions, Museus and colleagues employed a grounded theory approach to explore these issues.

The study consisted of 34 SEAA undergraduates from five public four-year colleges and universities across the U.S. Nineteen students were from the West Coast, three from the Midwest, and 12 from the East Coast. Among these students, nine were Cambodian, five were Hmong, three were Laotian, 13 were Vietnamese, and four were multiethnic SEAA. Twenty-six females and eight males participated in the study, and 32 students were second generation while two were 1.5 generation. Participants were recruited through two types of purposeful sampling- sampling for maximum variation and snowball sampling. Each student completed a questionnaire and participated in individual interviews.

Museus and his colleagues (2013) reported the four different components of their explanatory model in narrative form. The first component was the central phenomenon, the construct that was the central analysis. In this study, the central phenomenon was academic dispositions. These were defined as the dominant academic qualities of a student. The second components of the model were causal conditions, factors that caused the central

phenomenon. In this case, the factors were students' connections to their cultural heritage and campus cultural agents. The third component was the intervening or mediating condition that mediated the impact of causal conditions on the central phenomenon. Here, the intervening condition was cultural validation. The last component was the consequence of the central phenomenon. For this study, the consequence was the academic success of SEAA students.

Museus and colleagues' (2013) study drew several conclusions that provided important implications from their grounded theory exploration. First, the findings in this study supported previous assertions of the importance of connections to students' precollege communities. Another finding was the salience of SEAA students' connections with campus cultural agents who resembled their precollege communities. Museus and colleagues hypothesized that cultural agents could reduce the amount of cultural dissonance between students' cultures of origin and the cultures of their campuses. Furthermore, campus cultural agents validate students' backgrounds and identities. This finding also underscored the importance of having diverse staff and faculty members at colleges and universities. Another major finding was the importance of individual motivation to succeed. The researchers found that family and campus cultural agents were highly influential for SEAA students. The last major finding offered redefinitions of success. The SEAA students in this study had varied definition of success beyond degree attainment, some of these included pursuing a career that makes you happy and finding a career that is for the greater good.

What has been shown to support the retention of minoritized students? In his book, *Asian American in Higher Education*, Museus (2014) identified several perspectives and concepts for understanding Asian American students' success in college, but were

developed examining other populations of color. Two perspectives are cultural mechanisms and community cultural wealth, and the two concepts I chose to discuss are cultural validation and cultural belonging. Developed by Min (2003) and Zhou and Kim (2006), cultural mechanisms examine how community, family, and parental cultural values influence the success of K-12 students. Although the cultural mechanisms perspective has not yet been used to study Asian Americans in higher education, Museus warned against an oversimplistic use of the perspective that may overemphasize the importance of cultural values and disregard contextual and institutional factors that also influence student success. The community cultural wealth perspective, developed by Yosso (2005), shifted from a deficit perspective of understanding the success of students of color and focused on the tools and capital from students' cultural communities that helped them succeed. These six forms of community cultural wealth are: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. Museus argued that there was a need to understand how this perspective would inform the understanding of Asian American, and in particular Southeast Asian American, students' success. Introduced by Rendón (2004), the concept of cultural validation stated that institutions that created environments that served to validate students' cultural backgrounds facilitated more academic and social engagement. The last concept I discuss is cultural belonging. Developed by Hurtado and Carter (1997), this concept emphasizes the need of students of color to feel a connection to the cultures of their institutions. While these perspectives and concepts have been used to study the persistence and retention of other students of color, they have not yet been used to examine the experiences of Southeast Asian American college students.

The research addressing college student persistence and retention has been multiplying. As can be seen from the select articles addressing these issues, scholars have varied considerably in their approach to understanding and supporting college student retention. Despite the number of studies that have been conducted on the retention of students of color, clearly more work needs to be done. Article after article, scholars have called for more research, more empirical studies and more accountability from the institutions of higher education. One aspect related to institutional accountability and the persistence and retention of students of color is the campus racial climate.

Campus Racial Climate

Beginning in the 1990s, research on campus climate has gained substantial attention since it has been so closely associated with the satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, of students' academic and social experiences on college campuses. Although the operationalization of campus climate varies among researchers, the campus racial climate is a substantial component of understanding campus climate. According to Museus (2014), campus racial environments influence "the likelihood that students will have access to diverse learning opportunities, and the availability of diverse learning opportunities influence the ways in which students experience their institutions' racial environments" (p.93). While higher education institutions have been lauded for their increasing numbers of diverse students, Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) argued that the experiences and perceptions of campus environment vary considerably for students. Several scholars have noted the differences between white students and minortized students' perceptions of campus climate, in which these studies found severe consequences for racial and ethnic minorities who perceived their campus climate negatively (e.g., Ancis et al., 2000; Maramba, 2008; Reid & Radhakrishnan,

2003). In this section, I first discuss the theoretical frameworks that have been developed to understand campus climate and campus racial climate. Next, I discuss literature that has examined how minoritized students experience campus racial climate. I conclude with research that has been conducted on Asian American students and campus racial climate.

Understanding campus racial climate. Hurtado (1992) provided some of the grounding work for our current understandings of campus climate. She argued that prior to examining the relationship between campus climate and student development, we need a better understanding of what constitutes a racially tense climate. Critical of the lack of studies examining a variety of institutions, the purpose of Hurtado's (1992) study was to examine comparative institutional data that would help identify contexts for racial conflict. The framework of the study involved examining the structural properties of the environment, which "are central to shaping social interaction and the individual's attitude and behavior within it" (p. 546). Hurtado found that almost one in four students at all four-year schools had perceived racial conflict at their schools, and nearly one in three students perceived racial conflict at universities. Furthermore, students from private and public universities were more likely to perceive distrust between minority student groups and university administrators. In relation to this finding, less than one third of students perceived any specific goals by their institution to change the racial composition to increase minority representation, and less than half felt it was a high institutional priority to foster cultural and racial diversity on campus. The study found that there were lower perceptions of racial tension when students perceived the institution had "student-centered priorities." Hurtado (1992) concluded that racial tension on campuses was not the result of a single factor, but the result of "a configuration of external influences (historical and contemporary), structural characteristics of institutions and

group relations, and institutionalized ideologies" (p. 564). As one of the earlier studies on campus racial climate, Hurtado's work paved the way for other studies on campus racial climate.

Expanding on the findings from Hurtado's (1992) study and her subsequent work, Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1998) developed a conceptual framework that rested on the central notion that, "students are educated in distinct racial contexts" that are shaped by internal and external forces (p.281). External forces include governmental programs and policies and sociohistorical forces, which are events that occur outside of the campus realm. The internal forces are the institutional forces; there are four dimensions of this context: "the institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of various racial/ethnic groups, its structural diversity in terms of numerical representation of various racial/ethnic groups, the psychological climate of perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and the behavioral climate" (p. 281). To summarize their findings, the scholars argued that when examining institutional efforts to improve campus climate, the authors emphasized the importance of two issues: 1) the diversity of the campus environment and 2) the extent to which the campus values diversity. Since most minoritized students attend predominantly white institutions, Hurtado and colleagues (1998) deemed it necessary for schools recognize their exclusionary history in order to develop programs and policies that would improve the climate for diversity. The authors also argued the importance of having a diverse student population, and that institutions should develop programs that would allow members of the campus community to examine their own possible biases about people are who are different from them. Lastly, Hurtado and her colleagues advocated for campus

administrators and faculty to try and create opportunities for positive cross-racial interaction as often as possible.

Due to the shifting demographics on many college and university campuses, Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, and Arellano (2012) further expanded on the multidimensional and multicontextual model (Hurtado et al., 1998) by introducing the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (DLE Model). Previous campus climate models worked to guide institutions that desired to increase the diversity in their student body, but this model was developed to support institutions that already have a high level of student body diversity. The DLE Model takes into consideration the microsystem (individuals and roles), mesosystem (spheres of interaction), exosystem (such as external communities), and macrosystem (policy and socio-historical contexts). Not only does the model acknowledge the larger contextual factors that shape institutions, it also considers the multiple social identities of students, staff, and faculty. Hurtado and colleagues (2012) offered this model as a resource for theory development and the design of new studies.

While these studies laid the groundwork for future research on campus climate, the following section examines the empirical research that has been conducted to understand how minoritzed students, including Asian American students, experience campus racial climate. Despite the proliferation of research that has examined campus racial climate since the 90s, Harper and Hurtado's (2007) review of campus climate research reported that very few researchers have examined how Asian Americans experience campus climate.

How minoritized students experience campus racial climate. Several studies have examined minoritized students' experiences within their college campuses (e.g., Edman & Brazil, 2007; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole,

2002; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Morley, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). One finding was consistent across these studies—minoritized students perceive of their campus environment as more negative than their white peers. I highlight some of the studies in this section. Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) conducted a survey of 578 undergraduates (first and third years) at a large mid-Atlantic university in order to assess for students' perceptions of the campus cultural climate. The purpose of the study was to provide campus climate perceptions of students from multiple ethnicities, which the authors argued has been homogenous in comparison to white students. Also, the authors examined multiple dimensions of campus climate, including general perceptions of the campus climate as well as personal experiences with racism. The study included 235 white students, 126 African American students, 130 Asian American, and 77 Latino/a students; 324 participants were women and 254 participants were men. Students were mailed a Cultural Attitudes and Climate Questionnaire (CACQ), developed by Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto (1998). The CACQ measures "students' perceptions and experiences of the university racial and ethnic climate" (p. 181).

Ancis and colleagues' (2000) study yielded several findings that provided insight into the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students. Although it was not made explicit, it can be assumed from the breakdown of participants that the study was conducted at a predominantly white institution (PWI). The authors divided their results into three main categories: perceptions of general racial and ethnic climate, personal experiences of campus racism, and racial-ethnic comfort. Their results on students' perceptions of the general climate revealed that African American students perceived and experienced more racial conflict and racial-ethnic separation than white and Asian American students. Additionally,

African American students perceived more interracial issues in the residence halls. Contrastingly, white students experienced greater overall satisfaction with the university compared to African American and Asian American students. White students also perceived that faculty and students respected diverse students at higher levels than African American and Asian American students believed. In regards to personal experiences with campus racism, white students reported significantly greater satisfaction with their treatment from faculty than African American and Asian American students. It was also found that African American, Asian American, and Latino students all felt it necessary to conform to racial and ethnic stereotypes and minimize their ethnic characteristics in order to be accepted. Asian American and African American students felt this pressure more strongly than Latino/a students. Furthermore, Asian American and African American students perceived a greater degree of faculty racism than white students. In terms of racial-ethnic comfort, African American and Latino students felt more comfortable with both racially-ethnically similar and different faculty and students as compared with white students.

As can be seen from Ancis and colleagues' (2000) study, different racial and ethnic groups perceive their campus climate in different ways. Racial and ethnic minority students perceived and experienced more discrimination than white students. Comparatively, white students were less likely to perceive that any interracial tensioned existed on campus. African American students experience more racial tension than any other group, and Latinos/as experienced the least amount of racism compared to other minority groups. The authors attributed this to the minimal population of Latinos on campus (6%), as opposed to the percentage of African Americans (14%) and Asian Americans (12%) on campus; Latinos

could be seen as less of a threat to the dominant population because they were lesser in number.

Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) examined three different components of campus climate- the general campus climate, the racial climate, and the academic climate. The purpose of their study was to examine students' perceptions of their academic and racial climate as possible mediators of racial and ethnic differences in perceptions of the general campus climate. The study included 920 undergraduates and 503 graduate students at a large Midwestern state university. Reid and Radhakrishnan stated that very few studies have taken graduate students into consideration when examining campus climate. The breakdown of undergraduate participants included 426 white students, 239 Asian American students, 142 Latino students, and 113 African American students. The breakdown of graduate student participants included 425 white students, 119 Asian American students, 60 Latino students, and 69 African American students.

Similar to Ancis and colleagues' (2000) study, there were racial differences in perceptions of campus climate. Additionally, Reid and Radhakrishnan's (2003) study also found that African American students faced the most racial discrimination. In looking at the findings of the general campus climate scales, racial and ethnic minority students perceived a more negative general campus climate than white students, with African American students having the highest rates of negative perceptions. In looking at the findings of racial climate, students of color experienced more issues of racism than white students. Again, African American students reported more negative experiences than Asian American and Latino students. Additionally, Asian American students felt that the university could be doing a better job of promoting and supporting racial diversity than white students. The findings on

graduate students' perceptions on racial climate mirrored undergraduate students' perceptions. African American graduate students' perceived the most negative racial experiences, but Asian American and Latino students also perceived more negative racial experiences than white students. Lastly, in looking at the findings on academic climate, the perceptions of racial and ethnic minority undergraduate students did not differ from each other, but they differed from white students. However, for graduate students, African Americans perceived the most negative academic climate. When Reid and Radhakrishnan analyzed the racial and academic climate as a mediator for general campus climate, the authors found that academic climate was a better predictor of general campus climate than racial climate for all students. However, students of color perceived the general campus, racial climate, and academic climate as more negative than white students.

Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) conducted focus groups with African American, Asian-Pacific American, Chicano/Latino, and Native American undergraduate students at a four-year, public, predominantly white institution in the Northwest coast. These researchers expanded on previous studies by having students address issues of school resources and student service programs. Jones and colleagues focused on four specific research questions: 1) What is the perceived campus climate of ethnic minorities at this predominantly white institution?, 2) What is the ethnic minority experience at this PWI as it relates to services provided by student affairs?, 3) What role does the cross-cultural center play in their undergraduate experience?, and 4) What recommendations do students have for the university in general and student services to enhance their experience? (p.21). A total of 35 students participated in the study; the study included seven African American students, seven Asian-Pacific American students, 11 Chicano/Latino students, and 10 Native American

students. There were 14 males and 21 females, and these were all students who regularly used the cultural center.

In regards to the general campus climate, all four racial and ethnic groups were dissatisfied with the institutional effort to support diversity. In fact, all four groups questioned the university's commitment to diversity. Additionally, students felt the campus environment was unwelcoming, and there was a lack of diversity in the student body population. These findings mirror all of the studies discussed previously. Students of color also felt there was a lack of faculty of color, and the university made very little attempt to hire more faculty of color. Jones and colleagues reported there being only 15 faculty members of color at the university. In terms of student experiences, students of color felt alienated and many groups reported feeling overt discrimination and racism. Not only did students of color feel segregated from white students, they also felt there were lines between other ethnic groups. Many students who were highly involved on campus felt a sense of obligation to create a voice for themselves and create a difference in the campus community. The findings for student involvement revealed that many of the students were involved in the cultural center, but also in other areas of campus. However, African American students reported limiting their involvement across campus because they felt a lack of belonging. All of the groups reported their satisfaction with the efforts of the cross-cultural center. Additionally, all of the groups discussed the benefits of the center to their retention. The only issue was that the center was located in a remote part of campus and not central to the institution. In regards to departmental units, students had positive and negative opinions, though they did feel that different departmental units placed the responsibility of diversity programs into the hands of the cultural center rather than coordinating any themselves.

Lastly, the most common student recommendation were the efforts to recruit more diverse faculty, staff and students, and more effort to increase the retention of students of color.

How Asian American students experience campus racial climate. In this section, I highlight some of the literature that focused specifically on how Asian American students experience their campus racial climate. Museus and Truong (2009) examined how Asian American college students experience their campus environments at predominantly white institutions. Students were divided into groups who attended predominantly white high schools (WHSs) and students who attended predominantly minority high schools (MHSs). The data for this analysis was drawn from a larger study on campus climate and students of color, using twelve Asian American students for this study. Guiding their study were three research questions: 1) How do Asian American college students perceive institutional diversity at the PWI? 2) How do Asian American undergraduates perceive the campus racial climate at the institution? and 3) How do those perceptions differ between Asian American students from WHSs and MHSs? (p. 20).

Their study found three different ways in which the experiences of students from predominantly white high schools (WHSs) and predominantly minority high schools (MHSs) differed: differences in overall satisfaction with the campus climate, differences in the salience of prejudice and discrimination, and differences in students' reactions to racial stereotypes. Students who attended WHSs were more satisfied with the campus environment than students who attended MHSs. Although both groups reported that racial prejudice and discrimination existed on their campuses, MHSs students were more likely to discuss the salience of discrimination than WHSs students. The findings regarding reactions to racial stereotypes revealed that students from MHSs were more likely to report that racial

stereotypes had a great impact on their educational experience. These students felt greater pressure from the stereotypes, as opposed to students from WHSs who were either less conscious of the stereotypes or chose to label them as insignificant. Museus and Truong found that many of the stereotypes students discussed were related to the model minority myth. While Museus and Truong's study described Asian American students' experiences with campus climate, Cress and Ikeda's (2003) study analyzed the psychological impacts.

Cress and Ikeda (2003) examined the relationship between Asian American students' perceptions of campus climate and mental health. They found that Asian American students were more likely to report feelings of depression as well as negative perceptions of campus climate than all other students combined. Another finding in their study was the positive relationship between students' perceptions of discrimination and their feelings of depression. Moreover, Cress and Ikeda found that regardless the psychological state that students entered in, campus climate was a more significant predictor of experiencing depression. Students who experienced depression were less likely to get involved in campus activities and more likely to become academically disengaged. A more positive finding is that students who entered with higher self-concepts, even if they held perceptions of a negative campus climate, were less likely to report feeling depressed. Cress and Ikeda's study has underscored the importance of a positive campus racial climate for Asian American students. The issue of campus climate affects several aspects of Asian American college students' emotional and academic lives, and point to disastrous consequences for students who perceive negative campus climates. Follow-up studies should delve further into determining which aspects of campus climate play a stronger role in students' depression and determine whether there are ethnic differences within the Asian American group.

Museus and Park (2015) examined interview data from two studies (Museus, 2008; Museus, Maramba, Palmer, Reyes, & Bresonis, 2013) to understand how racism shaped the college experiences of Asian American students. Nine themes emerged from their findings: 1) students experienced racial hostility in the form of bullying, racial slurs, and racial profiling, 2) students experienced vicarious racism through the experiences of others, 3) students experienced racial isolation and marginalization, 4) students felt the pressure to racially segregate, 5) students felt the pressure to racially assimilate, 6) students were racially silenced and denied a voice in certain spaces, 7) students were ascribed to the forever foreigner myth, 8) students were ascribed to the model minority myth, and 9) students were ascribed to the inferior minority myth. Although this was not an exhaustive list of the racial experiences of Asian Americans, it was one of the first systematic analyses of how race still pervades the college experiences of Asian American students.

While Cress and Ikeda (2003), Museus and Truong (2009), and Museus and Park (2015) provided valuable insight into the campus climate experiences of Asian American students, this does not appropriately reflect the campus climate experiences of Southeast Asian American students. As students who are caught between the dichotomous stereotypes of "model minorities" or "deviant minorities" (Museus, 2014; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Um, 2003), what do their campus racial climate experiences look like? Are their racial experiences more complex depending on how they choose to identify—as Asian American, as Southeast Asian American, or by their ethnicity? These questions had yet to be examined by education scholars.

Research on campus climate has spanned twenty years, yet all of the current research still reiterates the findings of early studies (Harper and Hurtado, 2007). Each study has

reiterated the same findings- that students of color do not feel welcome on their campuses as compared to their white peers, and for Asian American students, this was shown to have severe psychological consequences (e.g., Ancis et al., 2000; Cress & Ikeda, 200). Harper and Hurtado (2007) argued:

> As long as administrators espouse commitments to diversity and multiculturalism without engaging in examinations of campus climates, racial/ethnic minorities will continue to feel dissatisfied, all students will remain deprived of the full range of educational benefits accrued through cross-racial engagement, and certain institutions will sustain longstanding reputations for being racially toxic environments. (p. 20)

Almost all students felt that their campuses did not have diversity as an essential value and felt their campus administrators were not doing enough to support diverse students. The results of all of these studies on minoritized students and campus climate highlight the dire need for campus administrators to make more serious efforts to value and support cultural and racial diversity in their institutions (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). As Rankin and Reason (2005) stated, "positive learning and social outcomes result when higher education administrators design focused, intentional multicultural experiences for students" (p. 43). Not only does more research need to be conducted to understand the campus climate experiences of all ethnic groups, higher education institutions also need to incorporate the findings from current research into their policies rather than just espousing a rhetoric of diversity (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

In this next section, I discuss the role of campus-based programs and how these spaces can often serve as counter-spaces to negative campus racial climates.

The Role of Campus-Based Programs in Supporting Student Persistence and Retention

Studies on minoritized student persistence and retention have consistently argued for institutions to hold themselves more accountable for efforts to increase retention rates of

students of color. Patton, Morelon, Whitehead, and Hossler (2006) conducted a systematic review of research that has published on campus-based retention initiatives. The authors argued that although numerous articles have developed theories and models to tackle the issue, higher education institutions are offered very few models for which they can implement on their campuses. The findings of Patton and colleagues point to the need to expand the number of empirical studies on campus-based retention initiatives. What was especially disconcerting about the authors' findings were the lack of studies conducted at community colleges and minority-serving institutions, where students of color more often need support. The following two sections discuss two empirical studies that examine the role of campus-based programs that support minoritized student persistence and retention.

Targeted support programs. Museus (2010) examined the role targeted support programs played in the success of racial and ethnic minority students at three college campuses that had "high and equitable retention and graduation rates" among students of color at predominantly white institutions (p. 10). This study was framed using Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital and the concept of social networks. Using this lens, Museus found it useful to understand how targeted support programs promote student success by aiding in the cultivation of social networks and, therefore, social capital. The main question guiding this study was: How do targeted support programs help racial/ethnic minority undergraduates access social networks and acquire social capital in college?

The qualitative study drew participants from three types of schools- a research university based on the West Coast, a state university in the city of New York, and a community college in rural, northern California. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit 65 participants for this study. Thirty-four faculty, administrators, and staff members and 31

students of color (nine Asian American, nine Black, and 13 Latina/o students) participated in the study. It is unclear how many participants were recruited from each school. Faculty, administrators, and staff were found through analyzing school websites. These participants then recommended students of color to participate in the study. Documents were collected that provided context for interviews, and individual interviews were conducted with all participants.

The data revealed two striking differences among the types of schools. First, many of the targeted support programs at community colleges and state universities did not offer physical spaces for students to work and socialize. These programs often consisted of administrator and staff offices. Second, the programs at community colleges and state universities were aimed at economic and academic issues, while research universities also offered programs that targeted cultural, social, and intellectual growth. Additionally, Museus drew several overarching conclusions from his study. First, the findings reveal that targeted support programs are critical for minority student success at PWIs. Second, targeted support networks aid connections between students and support networks, support the increase of students' social capital. Third, different types of connections are important to minority student success. Fourth, targeted support programs also help students cultivate early connections that aids in adjustment to the college. Fifth, the findings highlighted the importance of campus social agents that provided students with valuable connections. Lastly, targeted support programs integrate students into larger campus support networks.

Student-initiated retention projects (SIRPs). Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005) explored the role of student-initiated retention projects (SIRPs) at UC Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin-Madison in order to provide an alternative way to view

minoritized student retention. SIRPs emerged in the early to mid-1990s during the time of multicultural initiatives on college campuses led by students themselves, and mainly in response to affirmative action. As the authors stated, "Students of color saw the need to take control of their own academic support and recruitment initiatives" (p. 614). SIRPs "represent unified effort among student organizations to develop programs and support structures that are, in significant ways, student organized, student run, and student funded and that primarily serve students of color but are not necessarily limited to them" (Maldonado et al., 2005, p. 606). The researchers reported to believe only a dozen or so SIRPs exist across the country. Unlike the majority of studies that advocate for institutional change in order to support minority student persistence, this study highlighted how students took the initiative on their own to create persistence and retention support initiatives within their institutions. This was one of the very few studies that highlight student agency in creating structures of support for the masses. According to Maldonado and his colleagues, "no empirical research exists to date on this student-led movement" (p. 614).

Guided by a conceptual framework of cultural and social capital, collectivism, and social praxis, Maldonado and his colleagues sought to answer the following question: In what manner do student-initiated retention programs suggest new ways of conceptualizing retention theory among students of color? The researchers conducted a case-study of SIRPs at two universities in order to develop a "holistic understanding" of SIRPs (p. 615). Along with the collection of key documents, observations and formal structured interviews were also conducted. Six full-time professional staff members as well as 40 student organizers were interviewed in the study. Nineteen students were from Berkeley, 15 students were from Madison, and 11 students had previous worked at a SIRP and had since left the university.

The findings of Maldonado and colleagues' (2005) study suggested three concerns that SIRPs address. First, SIRPs helped students of color develop knowledge, skills and networks. According to student organizers, these are necessary tools for student success and persistence. This finding is conceptually tied to the ideas of cultural and social capital. Second, SIRPs aided students of color in building a sense of commitment and ties to certain communities, including ethnic and racial communities. The authors connected this finding to the concept of collectivism. Third, SIRPs helped minoritized students challenge oppressive social and institutional norms. This finding was conceptually to the idea of social praxis. By integrating the empirical and theoretical understandings of the retention of racial and ethnic minority students the authors propose a new theoretical framework to study minoritized student retention. However, the framework rests upon the integration of all three components in understanding the complexities of minoritized student retention. Also apparent in this framework is that "student activists played a key role in framing our understanding of self-empowerment and the role of student-led efforts to enhance the academic lives of students of color" (p. 633).

No other study has focused on student-led efforts in as much detail as Maldonado and his colleagues have done with this study. By garnering scholarly attention to student-led efforts, this study has produced valuable findings that offer a reframing of how minoritized student retention should be viewed. Moving beyond individualist, social integrationist, and multiculturalist frameworks of student retention, Maldonado and his colleagues offered a framework not previously explored—the role of collective student agency in creating change. Although so few student-initiated retention projects exist, more empirical research should is needed to examine the longitudinal effects of SIRPs on retention rates. Not only do these

programs work to provide holistic support in the persistence of students of color, these programs empower students who work to create change for themselves and for their fellow classmates.

Summary of Key Issues

As can be seen in this literature review, there is much work to be done and there are several factors to consider in understanding the factors influencing the persistence and retention of Southeast Asian American students in higher education. Illuminated in Um's (2003) paper from the first national Southeast Asian Youth Summit and Yeh's (2004) article on the challenges for Southeast Asian American persistence and retention, students are experiencing individual, familial, contextual, and structural barriers to their educational achievement. These challenges continue to be reiterated in the work on specific Southeast Asian American ethnic groups (e.g., Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Vue, 2013), but these studies also identified various support mechanisms and systems in students' multiple worlds that have contributed to the success of these Southeast Asian American college students. Existing studies have profoundly contributed to the knowledge of how Southeast Asian American students can be successful, yet their findings reveal that there is more work to be done to understand other influences on student persistence and to continue raising educational attainment levels. This dissertation contributes to this valuable body of literature by examining students' pathways into the university—how their families, home communities, peers, and K-12 experiences played a role in the decisions that lead them to their university.

The more expansive work on minoritized student persistence and retention and campus climate has produced several frameworks for understanding how these issues might be tackled for the Southeast Asian American population. The frameworks and perspectives

that have been developed after Tinto's (1975, 2012) theory of college student departure have greatly expanded our knowledge on how we can support the academic success of students of color. The importance of cultural validation and allowing students to establish a sense of belonging was apparent throughout much of the literature, and this also called for institutions of higher education to claim more accountability in their role of creating campus cultures that value diverse students. Moreover, since campus racial climate has been found to have potentially disastrous effects on minoritized students' academic, social, and psychological experiences, I considered it vital to include this component in my current study. This study provides initial insight into how Southeast Asian American students experience the campus racial climate and their campus environments. Therefore, the conceptual framework I chose for this dissertation integrated several of the components identified in the literature review that could influence the persistence and retention of Southeast Asian American students. In the next chapter, I discuss the purpose of the study, the research questions that guided this study, and the conceptual framework that was drawn from this literature review.

Chapter 3

Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, and Conceptual Framework

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the educational experiences of Southeast Asian American college students. More specifically, I was interested in learning how Southeast Asian American students entered the university setting and identifying the factors that affect their persistence, retention, and eventual graduation from college. Using a conceptual framework that combined the Bridging Multiple Worlds Model, cultural validation frameworks, and campus racial climate frameworks provided a structure to holistically examine students' experiences. This study examined the role of students' worlds and experiences on their decision to go to college, stay in college, graduate, and pursue the careers they desire. Although cited as an academically underachieving group, scholars have frequently noted the lack of research aimed at understanding the persistence and retention issues of Southeast Asian American students (Carter, 2006; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Museus, 2010; Yeh, 2004). Therefore, this study is one of the first that provides an in-depth, qualitative analysis of Southeast Asian American college students' lived experiences and the factors that have a role in keeping them in or pushing them out of college.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1) What were the pathways that led Southeast Asian American students to academically rigorous universities?
2) Who or what provides support to students, and who or what causes difficulties for students?

3) How do Southeast Asian American students experience campus racial climate, and how does the campus racial climate affect students' experiences at their university?
4) To what extent are culturally validating environments available to students at their university, and how do these environments support students' multiple worlds?

I considered both student persistence and student retention in this study, but I also acknowledge that they are different constructs. Retention is viewed from a single institutional perspective, defined as "students who remain enrolled at the same institution as which they began" (Adelman, 2006; Hossler, Dundar, & Shapiro, 2013, p.141). Persistence expands on the definition of retention to include students who have left their university and transferred to another institution. Therefore, persistence "is more appropriately considered a student measure than an institutional one" (Hossler, Dundar, & Shapiro, 2013, p.141). Using these definitions, I define persistence in this study as the motivations and the decisions of students to be in college, graduate, and pursue their career aspirations. I define retention as the ability of the four-year institutions to support students' matriculation and eventual graduation. This is operationalized as the institutional aspects that push or pull students to want to stay in or leave college.

Research questions explained. Drawn from the conceptual framework, these research questions aimed to provide a comprehensive examination of Southeast Asian American college students' experiences. The first research question helped us understand how students chose to attend academically rigorous universities. From this question, we understand why students were in college, who or what was influential in their academic decisions, and who or what helped them get to college. The second question provided us with more insight as to who or what has supported or caused difficulties for students on their educational pathway.

This research question was developed with the understanding that students are part of multiple worlds (family, peers, college, etc.), and sometimes, these multiple worlds may not always have the same expectations of the student (Cooper, 2011). Or sometimes, these worlds can interact to serve as sources of support or difficulties in students' educational experiences. Furthermore, this question helped identify patterns of personal and institutional resources or challenges that aid in the persistence and retention of Southeast Asian American college students. The third question was influenced by existing literature on the retention of minoritized students. Campus racial climate research has consistently found that minoritized students are dissatisfied with the campus climate at their schools, which could affect their retention (e.g., Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Additionally, Harper and Hurtado's (2007) review of campus climate research reported that very few researchers have examined how Asian American students experience campus climate. This question helped us understand how Southeast Asian American students experience campus racial climate. The fourth question sought to explore the resources that were available on university campuses that validate students' identities and communities. Combined, these questions provided a more nuanced understanding of how Southeast Asian American students' experience higher education. While I acknowledge that there are several other components of the university experience and within students' lives that may have an effect on their college persistence and retention, I also acknowledge that I was limited in the scope of my study with the resources that I had. However, I believe that the theoretical frameworks I chose to guide this dissertation allowed for a very thorough understanding of the Southeast Asian American college student experience. This study contributes to a limited, but growing number of studies on Southeast Asian Americans and education.

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by three theoretical perspectives that were adapted in order to form a comprehensive examination of factors affecting the persistence and retention of Southeast Asian American college students. These perspectives included: 1) the Bridging Multiple Worlds Model (Cooper, 2003, 2011), 2) cultural validation frameworks (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, Maramba, Palmer, Reyes, & Bresonis, 2013; Rendón, 1994), and 3) campus racial climate frameworks (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solórzano, 2009). The Bridging Multiple Worlds framework was the main framework that guided this inquiry, and the cultural validation and campus racial climate frameworks were included to supplement aspects of students' campus experiences that were not included in the Bridging Multiple Worlds Model.

Bridging Multiple Worlds. The Bridging Multiple Worlds model (Cooper, Cooper, Jr., Azmitia, Chavira, & Gullatt, 2002; Cooper, 2011) combined ecocultural perspectives (e.g., Gallimore, Goldenberg, & Weisner, 1993; Rogoff, 2003) with the Students' Multiple Worlds model (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1991) to illustrate how ethnic minority youth developed their identities and maintained ties to their cultural communities as they navigated their academic pathways. During this process, students must learn to negotiate their roles in the multiple "worlds" they are part of; these worlds can include their families, peers, schools, and communities. To trace this academic journey, the Bridging Multiple Worlds Model focused on five dimensions: 1) family demographics, 2) aspirations and identity pathways, 3) math and language academic pathways through school, 4) challenges and resources across the worlds of families, peers, schools, and communities, and 5) cultural research partnerships

between universities and communities (Cooper, 2011, p. 100). The focus of this perspective was to help "ethnically diverse youth build their pathways to college and careers without giving up their ties to their families and cultural communities" (p. 101). The Model also emphasized the importance of discovering "cultural meanings by listening to youth, families, and communities describe their experiences rather than relying on demographic categories to summarize and implicitly explain such meanings" (Cooper, 2011, p. 17). As researchers, we must place value on students' voices and lived experiences.

Since the Bridging Multiple Worlds Model focused on youth and their pathways to college, I modified the model for a higher education setting in my study. Drawing from the framework, I focused on students' "worlds" as identified by the model (families, peers, schools, and communities), but I also provided students with the opportunity to choose additional worlds that they consider part of their identity in the Southeast Asian College Student Experiences Survey (Phommasa, 2014). Additionally, I examined students' sources of support and challenge and those who serve as cultural/institutional brokers and cultural/institutional gatekeepers for students as they navigate their higher education pathway (Cooper, 2011). In the rest of this section, I discuss two additional perspectives that were incorporated into the proposed model of Southeast Asian American college student persistence.

Cultural Validation. To examine cultural validation, I drew on the work on Rendón (1994), Maramba and Palmer (2014), and Museus, Maramba, Palmer, Reyes, and Bresonis (2013). Since I discussed Maramba and Palmer (2014) and Museus and colleague's (2103) studies in-depth in the literature review, I will highlight the components of their frameworks that informed this study. With the demographics of the student body changing drastically

during the early 1990s, Rendón (1994) sought to understand how college campuses could better meet the needs of the increasingly diverse student body. The scholar found that "when external agents took the initiative to validate students, academically and/or interpersonally, students began to believe they could be successful" (p. 40). These experiences occurred inside and outside of the classroom, and validating experiences outside of the classroom were equally as important as validating experiences inside of the classroom.

Museus and colleagues (2013) defined cultural validation as "college educator's affirmation of students' cultural identities and backgrounds" (p. 14), and Maramba and Palmer (2014) expanded on Rendón's work to define it as "recognizing, respecting, and appreciating students as well as their families and communities" (p. 517). Through their study, Maramba and Palmer (2014) found that cultural validation was important for helping Southeast Asian American college students: 1) gain cultural knowledge that is relevant to their backgrounds, 2) gain access to those who are culturally familiar, 3) gain opportunities for cultural expression, and 4) gain opportunities for cultural advocacy (p. 519). Drawing on these definitions of cultural validation, I examined the construct through Maramba and Palmer's (2014) work to analyze Southeast Asian American students' opportunities for cultural knowledge, cultural familiarity, cultural expression, and cultural advocacy at their universities.

Campus Racial Climate. According to Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1998), "students are educated in distinct racial contexts" that are shaped by internal and external forces (p. 281), and these environments shape student's attitudes, actions, and social interactions (Hurtado, 1992). Campus racial climate is a critical component when examining the educational experiences of minority students. With this understanding, I drew

from the work of Hurtado and colleagues (1992, 1998), Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) and Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) to examine the campus racial climate experiences of Southeast Asian American students. Solórzano and colleagues (2000) argued that understanding campus racial climate is an important and necessary part of "examining college access, persistence, graduation, and transfer to and through graduate and professional school for African American students" (p.62). Although Solórzano's study focused on African American students, the same argument could be used to advocate for Southeast Asian American students. Expanding on this definition, Yosso and colleagues (2009) stated that campus racial climate was "the overall racial environment of the university that could potentially foster outstanding academic outcomes and graduation rates for all students but too often contributes to poor academic performance and high dropout rates for Students of Color" (p.664). A "positive campus racial climate" includes: 1) students, faculty, and administrators of color, 2) a curriculum reflecting the experiences of people of color, 3) programs that support the recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color, and 4) a mission that reflects the school's commitment to diversity (p.664). Several scholars have found that a negative campus climate has contributed to negative academic outcomes and higher dropout rates for African American students; therefore, Solórzano and colleagues (2000) asserted that a positive campus racial climate could lead to more positive academic outcomes. When researching campus racial climate, very few scholars have qualitatively examined how racial microaggressions can also play a role in creating a negative campus racial climate (Yosso et al., 2009). Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) defined racial microaggressions as "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (p.60). Pierce (1970, 1974, 1989) as

discussed by Huber and Solorzano (2015) found negative physiological and psychological effects associated with microaggressions and argued that "the effects were cumulative, taking a toll on the bodies, minds, and spirits of People of Color over time" (p. 14). Therefore, to examine campus racial climate in this study, I employed Yosso and colleagues (2009) conditions for a positive campus racial climate as well as examining incidents of racism and racial microaggressions. Using a campus racial climate framework filled the void on addressing issues of racism and discrimination that the Bridging Multiple Worlds model and the cultural validation frameworks did not address explicitly.

After examining the limited literature on the experiences of Southeast Asian American students in higher education and the literature on minoritized student retention and campus racial climate, I adapted specific components of these three frameworks that allowed for a more comprehensive examination of understanding the factors that influenced the college persistence and retention of Southeast Asian American college students. The Bridging Multiple Worlds (Cooper et al., 2002; Cooper, 2011), cultural validation (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus et al., 2013; Rendón, 1994), and campus racial climate (Hurtado et al., 1992; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009) frameworks did not work in isolation, but were interrelated aspects of students' experiences that played a role in their college persistence. These frameworks also informed the methodology of this study, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Methodology

This mixed methods study used case study and survey research methods to guide the research design, data collection, analyses, and report of findings (Yin, 2014). Case study research "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2014, p.16). According to Yin (2014), certain types of case studies can be considered a form of mixed methods research. For example, embedded case studies "may rely on holistic data collection strategies for studying the main case and then call upon surveys or other quantitative techniques to collect data about the embedded unit(s) of analysis" (p.66). This study used an embedded multiple-case design, recruiting undergraduate students from two research institutions in the University of California system. Nested in the case study, each student was required to complete a survey, adapted from Cooper and colleague's (2002) Bridging Worlds Survey. A mixed methods design was chosen due to the depth of data that can be obtained through these research methods.

Research Sites

The research sites for this study were two Research 1 institutions in California: Coral Tree University and Redwood University[4]. These campuses were chosen due to the similar admissions requirements expected of undergraduate applicants and both are considered academically rigorous research universities. However, as can be seen in Table 5, these two campuses differ greatly in their proportion of Asian American and Pacific Islander and white student populations. The cultural milieu of each campus is reflective of these percentages. To

[4] Even though both campuses are part of the University of California school system, Coral Tree University and Redwood University are both pseudonyms to help maintain student anonymity.

describe the contexts of which each university is situated: Coral Tree University[5] is situated by a predominantly white city (86%) with a very small Asian American population (6%), while Redwood University[6] is situated near several large Asian American communities (39%).

Interestingly, even though the percentages of Asian American and Pacific Islander and white students have stayed relatively similar at Coral Tree University from the 2012-2013 to the 2014-2015 academic years, the percentages of both student populations have dropped at Redwood University. What has increased at Redwood University is the population of "Hispanic" students from 18% in 2012-2013 to 24% in 2014-2015. This is demographic shift is a phenomenon worth examining in future studies.

Table 5
Population of Asian/Pacific Islander and White Students at Coral Tree University and Redwood University

	Coral Tree		Redwood	
	2012-2013	2014-2015	2012-2013	2014-2015
Undergraduate population	18,977	19,362	22,216	24,489
Asian/Pacific Islander student population	4,364 (23%)	4,689 (25%)	10,553 (48%)	10,004 (42%)
White student population	7,964 (42%)	7,662 (41%)	4,040 (18%)	3,592 (14%)

Note. Data obtained from 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 [Coral Tree University] campus portrait and the 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 [Redwood University] campus portrait.

[5] http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/06083.html
[6] http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0636770.html

Campus Climate. According to the University of California Office of the President Campus Climate Study report (2014), a "large majority" of UC constituents (students, staff, and faculty) were satisfied with the overall campus climate at their universities. At Coral Tree University, 84% of respondents were "comfortable"/ "very comfortable" with the overall climate, and 81% were "comfortable"/ "very comfortable" with the level of diversity (UCOP, 2014). At Redwood University, 80% of respondents were "comfortable"/ "very comfortable" with the overall climate, and 75% were "comfortable"/ "very comfortable" with the level of diversity. However, the study also reported that underrepresented minority students were less comfortable with the overall climate and workplace climate than white respondents or other people of color. The study limited the definition of underrepresented minorities to African American/African/Black respondents, American Indian/Alaskan Native respondents, Hispanic/Latino respondents, and those who marked that they were both Underrepresented Minority and White. Interestingly, and not surprising, the UC Office of the President study did not consider any of the Asian American or Pacific Islander subgroups as underrepresented minorities.

Since Coral Tree University has a higher percentage of white students than other racial groups and Redwood University has a higher percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students than other racial groups, I was interested in examining for differences in the campus climate experiences of Southeast Asian American students due to the racial and ethnic demographics at each school. Of course, Southeast Asian American students at Redwood University were also a minority compared to other Asian American ethnic groups at that university. Vue's (2013) study found that despite the majority group being Asian Americans

at West Coast University, Hmong American college students still felt marginalized since there were so few coethnics on their campus.

Southeast Asian American retention at Coral Tree University and Redwood University. The California universities did not disaggregate for other Southeast Asian subgroups aside from Vietnamese in their undergraduate applications until the success of the Count Me In campaign (CARE, 2013). After 2009-2010, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong were included as options. I was able to obtain disaggregated retention rates of Southeast Asian students from the [Coral Tree University] Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment (Table 6) and the [Redwood University] Office of Institutional Research (Table 7).

Table 6
Coral Tree University Freshmen Retention Rates of Southeast Asian American Students

Entering year	Ethnicity	Number of students entering cohort	Number returned for Fall of 2nd year	Percentage returned for Fall of 2nd year	Number returned for Fall of 3rd year	Percentage returned for Fall of 3rd year
2010-2011	Vietnamese	105	96	91.4%	82	78.1%
	Cambodian	16	16	100%	14	87.5%
	Hmong	4	4	100%	4	100%
	Laotian	6	6	100%	5	83.3%
	Total	131	122	93.1%	105	86.1%
2011-2012	Vietnamese	159	144	90.6%		
	Cambodian	19	17	89.5%		
	Hmong	3	2	66.7%		
	Laotian	2	1	50.0%		
	Total	183	164	89.6%		

Note. Data obtained from [Coral Tree University] Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment

Table 7
Redwood University Freshmen Retention Rates of Southeast Asian Students

Entering year	Ethnicity	Number of students entering cohort	Number returned for Fall of 2nd year	Percentage returned for Fall of 2nd year	Number returned for Fall of 3rd year	Percentage returned for Fall of 3rd year
2010-2011	Vietnamese	349	334	95.7%	305	91.4%
	Cambodian	29	26	89.7%	23	89.7%
	Hmong	13	13	100.0%	13	100.0%
	Laotian	5	5	100.0%	4	80.0%
	Total	396	378	95.5%	345	91.2%
2011-2012	Vietnamese	420	399	95.0%		
	Cambodian	39	38	97.4%		
	Hmong	10	6	60.0%		
	Laotian	3	3	100.0%		
	Total	472	446	94.5%		

Note. Data obtained from [Redwood University] Office of Institutional Research

The overall retention rates for first-time, full-time freshmen entering in Fall 2011 was 93% for Redwood University and 91% for Coral Tree University, according to the campus portraits. Although the retention rates of Southeast Asian Americans appear favorable after their first year for the 2010 entering cohort, the retention rate drops a noticeable amount at both campuses once students are entering their third year. The retention rates for Coral Tree University are also noticeably lower than the retention rates at Redwood University. Based on enrollment figures, one of the hypotheses could be that Coral Tree University lacks a critical mass of Southeast Asian American or coethnic students that allow students to develop the community of support they might need. Looking at Table 7, the retention rates of Southeast Asian students are more favorable at Redwood University than at Coral Tree University, but when taking into consideration the very minimal numbers of Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian students enrolling each year, the retention of all students is important

for developing a critical mass of coethnics. Although Redwood University has a high percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students, the numbers indicate that Southeast Asian Americans may not comprise a substantial proportion of Asian/Pacific Islander population. Therefore, Southeast Asian Americans can be considered minorities on both campuses. According to Um (2003), this is distressing as Redwood University is one of the few UCs that is located near "some of the biggest Southeast Asian communities in the United States" (p.ii). Drawing upon the previous sections of this dissertation that alluded to the high poverty rates of Southeast Asian Americans and high rates of unemployment for Asian Americans without a bachelor's degree, it is essential that all students who aspire to graduate actually accomplish this goal.

Participants

Participants in this study included 24 Southeast Asian American undergraduate students from both Coral Tree University and Redwood University. Table 8 provides a profile of student participants. Twelve students were selected from each campus. Southeast Asian American students were defined as students who identified themselves as having Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, or Hmong ethnic backgrounds. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of student participants by ethnicity and gender. Overall, nine students identified as male and fifteen identified as female. Nine students identified as Vietnamese American, eight identified as Cambodian American, five identified as Hmong American, and two identified as Lao American. Student who had multiethnic backgrounds identified the one that was most salient to them. For the purposes of analyzing for persistence and retention, only students in their second year and beyond were selected for this study. Transfer students must have been at their campuses for one year or more. Seven students were in their second year,

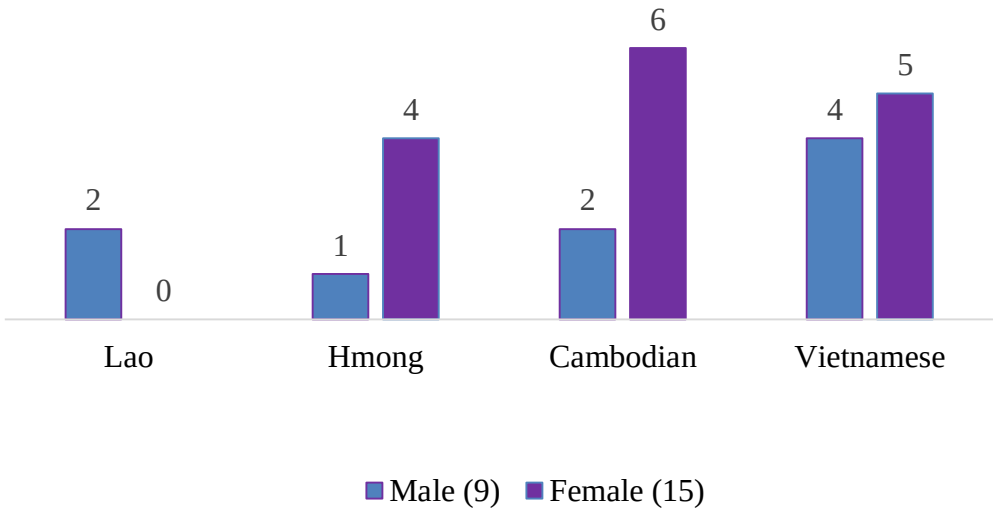
five students were in their third year, ten students were in their fourth year, one student was in his fifth year, and one student was in his second year as a transfer student.

Table 8
Student Participants

Name[7]	Ethnicity	University	Year in school
Adam	Lao American	Coral Tree	4th (transfer)
Alex	Hmong American	Redwood	5th
Amelia	Vietnamese American	Redwood	2nd
Anna	Hmong American	Coral Tree	2nd
Beth	Vietnamese American	Coral Tree	4th
Charlie	Lao American	Redwood	2nd
Chloe	Vietnamese/Chinese/Cambodian American	Redwood	2nd
Ethan	Vietnamese American	Redwood	4th
Evelyn	Hmong American	Coral Tree	4th
Grace	Cambodian American	Redwood	4th
Henry	Vietnamese American	Redwood	4th
Isabel	Cambodian American	Coral Tree	4th
Jack	Cambodian American	Coral Tree	4th
Jasmine	Cambodian American	Redwood	3rd
Jeff	Vietnamese American	Coral Tree	3rd
Kim	Vietnamese American	Coral Tree	3rd
Lily	Cambodian American	Coral Tree	2nd
Molly	Hmong American	Redwood	4th
Natalie	Cambodian American	Redwood	2nd
Nathan	Chinese/Cambodian American	Redwood	3rd
Sara	Vietnamese/Chinese American	Coral Tree	4th
Sophia	Cambodian American	Coral Tree	2nd
Tom	Vietnamese American	Coral Tree	3rd
Vivian	Hmong American	Redwood	4th

[7] All names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

Figure 1. Breakdown of Student Participants by Ethnicity and Gender



Recruitment

Purposeful sampling techniques, sampling for maximum variation and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants from each campus (Patton, 2002). Once human subjects approval was granted, solicitation for research participants began in February 2014. In order to aid interested students who were nervous or hesitant about contacting me first, I created a Google web form that allowed students to submit their name, email, and phone number in order to be contacted for the study. A copy of the web form can be seen in Appendix A. All students' information was secured and password protected through my Google account. This link was embedded in the flyer I created to advertise the study and recruit participants. The flyer can be found in Appendix B. Thirty-four students responded to web form.

Participants were recruited through various methods at each university. At Coral Tree University, I requested for flyers to be posted in the Asian American Studies Department as well as through the Center for Science and Engineering Partnerships (CSEP) to diversify the range of student demographics. Additionally, I observed an Asian American Studies course on *Asian Americans and Education* and was invited to share about my work. After the class, I had several students who expressed interest in the study and offered to advertise the flyers in their student clubs and organizations, including ethnic student clubs. This created a snowball effect as several students told me that they heard about the study from their friends. Flyers were also sent to officers of ethnic clubs requesting that they share the flyer on their Facebook page. Also, since I had been a teaching assistant for 12 Asian American Studies courses, three of the participants were former students who came across the advertisement and one participant chose to enroll in my course the following quarter after her interview. At Redwood University, I visited the campus outreach and retention center during Fall 2014 to learn about the services that were offered to students. I was introduced to a Southeast Asian American student, Ethan, who had recently developed a retention seminar for Southeast Asian American freshmen and transfer students—Southeast Asian Retention through Creating Hxstory (hereafter referred to as SEARCH). Ethan asked me to be a guest speaker in the seminar, to which I agreed. When I was ready for data collection, I sent flyers to Ethan to distribute at Redwood University since he was highly involved in several student clubs and organizations. Through a snowball effect, I was able to recruit all 12 students from Redwood University relatively quickly. Also, one of the students, Nathan, had attended my guest lecture in SEARCH and contacted me to be part of the study.

Recruitment for this study went quickly, and I had to turn away several students due to limitations in research funding. Due to high volume of responses, I was able to be selective in order to achieve balance in gender and ethnicity. The one difficulty I experienced during the recruitment process was finding Lao American students at both universities. They were among two of the last students to be recruited for the study and found by fellow research participants. In both interviews, Charlie and Adam admitted to knowing no other Lao students at their universities. Adam was Charlie's cousin who only reached out to me after I met Charlie and told him I was still looking for Lao American students at Coral Tree University. This was a similar problem in my master's research (Phommasa, 2012), where I only had one Lao American student participant who attended a research university. This issue needs further exploration.

Data Collection

The following three instruments were used to collect data from participants:

1. Archival records in the form of unofficial school transcripts
2. Southeast Asian American College Student Experiences Survey (Appendix C)
3. Interview Guide (Appendix D)

Data collection occurred between April 2014 to June 2014. All students signed a consent form prior to participating in the study. In compensation for their time, students chose between a $50 Amazon or Trader Joe's gift card that was given to them at the start of the interview. The gift cards were funded by the [Coral Tree University] Graduate Division's Humanities and Social Science Research Grant.

Once students expressed an interest in participating in the study, I corresponded with them through email to set up a date for Coral Tree University students to sign a consent form

and pick up a survey from my office or to request mailing addresses to send consent forms and surveys to Redwood University students. Each envelope included a pre-addressed and pre-stamped envelope for students from Redwood University to mail the materials back to me. Students from Coral Tree University chose to either complete their survey in my office or returned the survey to my office when they were finished. Once surveys were returned, interview dates were scheduled. Interviews with students at Coral Tree University were held in my private office, and I asked all students at Redwood University to book private study rooms for our interviews. During April through June 2014, I made several interviewing trips down to Redwood University to accommodate students' schedules. The specifics of each instrument are discussed below.

Survey. The Southeast Asian American College Student Experiences Survey expanded on Cooper's (2002) Bridging Worlds Survey for college students. Questions were added to the new survey to also reflect the cultural validation and campus racial climate frameworks. The survey was intended to provide an initial understanding of who the student is, what their worlds are, how their worlds are in harmony or conflict, and their experiences at the university. Survey responses were used to guide specific interview questions. There were 12 sections to the Southeast Asian American College Student Experiences Survey, 11 of which were titled as indicated below. The first section asked for students' demographic information. This included their name and contact information, their ethnicity and generation, and their university status. The second section of the survey *(Who are the people in your family?)* asked for family demographics. The third section *(What are your worlds?)* asked students to identify and circle the different worlds they consider themselves to be part of. Students were also encouraged to write in any worlds that are important to them that were not

included in the survey. The fourth section *(What do people expect of you in your main worlds?)* listed positive and negative expectations that people in each of their worlds may have for them. Students were asked to choose up to 6 expectations that people in each of their worlds have for them. The fifth section *(How do expectations in each of your different worlds fit together?)* asked students to describe how the expectations of each of their worlds fit with the expectations of their family. Expectations may "fit together really well", be "in conflict", or "not connected." The sixth section *(How do expectations in each of your different worlds fit with your expectations for yourself?)* asked students to do the same as the previous section, but to consider how the expectations of each of their worlds fit with the expectations they had for themselves. The seventh section *(How influential are your worlds?)* allowed students to rank how influential each of their worlds have been on why they are in college and the influences on their educational and career plans. The eighth section *(Who helps you?)* identified specific people who have assisted students' in various aspects of their personal and academic lives. Relatedly, the ninth section *(Who causes you difficulties?)* identified specific people who have caused personal or academic challenges for students. Section ten *(Racial/ethnic experiences at your university)* was developed in order to reflect the cultural validation and campus racial climate frameworks. This section had two main goals: 1) to understand how students felt about being a Southeast Asian American student on their campus and whether they felt a sense of belonging on their campus and 2) to understand how students viewed the campus racial climate on their campus. The eleventh section *(Future plans)* compared students' aspirations with the aspirations that their families have for them. Students also reported whether they feel this was a source of conflict with their families. The last section (*We want your opinion about…*) was an open-ended question asking students to

identify the people or experiences that have been major influences on their plans for the future. This was different from previous questions asking students to rank how influential their worlds have been or to list people who have supported or challenged them because it allowed students to share any experiences that could not be listed previously in the survey. Ending on an open-ended question allowed students to share any positive or negative experiences or interactions that had had an effect on their future. This survey took each student about 20-30 minutes to complete. All survey data was entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for analysis.

Unofficial transcripts. Students provided their unofficial university transcripts with their surveys or when they showed up for their interviews. According to Yin (2014), gathering documentation "can provide other specific details to corroborate information from other sources" (p.107). These transcripts allowed me to see their academic progress and understand whether or not students were struggling academically; this was used to corroborate with the self-reported data on surveys. This information was useful in guiding interview questions regarding academic progress and confirmed whether students had been on the dean's honor roll or academic probation.

Interviews. According to Yin (2014), interviews are "one of the most important sources of case study evidence" (p.110). In-depth interviewing methods were used for this study (Patton, 2002). Although an interview protocol was used to guide the interview, they also took the form of open-ended conversations on topics that emerged during the interview (Yin, 2014). Survey responses were used to tailor the interview guides for each student, and the survey was available for students to reference during the interview. Interviews generally lasted about one and a half hours in length, but some lasted for two to three hours. Two of the

interviews with students at Redwood University had to be done in two parts due to time limitations.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by myself, my research assistants, or through a professional transcription service (GMR Transcription Services). All participants' names were edited out prior to being handled by research assistants or the professional transcription service. Research assistants did not work on transcriptions for interviews from Coral Tree University since they were also students at the university and had possible connections to research participants. Research assistants were three undergraduate students hired in summer 2014 and funded by a research grant awarded by the Asian American Student Success Program at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Each research assistant was interviewed prior to being selected, signed a privacy statement prior to working with the data, and paid $12 an hour. They were educated on all background aspects of the study and trained to process data through transcription work. One research assistant continued through the school year and was trained to conduct data analyses (interview coding).

Data Analysis

Data analyses was guided by strategies suggested by Creswell (2014), Merriam (2009), Saldaña (2013), and Yin's (2014) approaches to qualitative data analysis. I began with a "ground up" approach and read all of the transcripts, surveys, and transcripts through once and made note of interesting findings (Cresswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). Since I used a case study approach in the research design, I also made initial notes of observed differences between students' experiences at Coral Tree University and students' experiences at Redwood University. Next, I employed Saldaña's (2013) method of structural coding to

develop initial themes and categories and "examine comparable segments, commonalities, differences, and relationships" (p. 84) across each of the interviews. I began by using structural coding on one or two transcripts from each university. Since the interviews were only semi-structured, various students had structural codes that did not emerge in the other interviews. Through these structural codes, I could determine whether my research questions were answered (Merriam, 2009). Once there appeared to be a clear theme in the structural codes across the transcripts, I developed a codebook (Appendix E) that listed all of the structural codes that emerged. This was also used to guide my research assistant through her focused coding. After the codebook was developed, I began more in-depth and focused coding of each transcript by using descriptive and in vivo coding methods (Saldaña, 2013). An analytic memo was created for each transcript, organized by structural codes and included all of the descriptive and in vivo codes. An initial analysis was written after each group of related structural codes. A sample analytic memo can be seen in Appendix F. Once all analytic memos were completed, they were used for "within-case analysis" and "cross case analysis" (Merriam, 2009). Each individual student's analytic memo and survey was analyzed in-depth, and then cross-case analyses was done to compare across all students and then to compare students' experiences at both universities.

Researcher Role and Identity

My own identity as Southeast Asian American graduate student better allowed for the establishment of rapport and trust with my student participants. Establishing rapport is an important component of an in-depth interview, and often requires more personal self-disclosure on the part of the researcher (Johnson, 2001). Johnson (2001) also emphasized the importance of recognizing the researcher's own role as an insider and understanding the

influence this may have on reflection and written accounts during the interview process. Anthropologists use the term "halfie researcher" to describe those who have an in-between status and are, therefore, required to "be more accountable to how they have researched and written about the people with whom they affiliate" (Subedi, 2006, p. 574). Although being a Southeast Asian American graduate student helped me relate to my participants and more easily establish rapport, I was determined to conduct research that honors and advances the Southeast Asian community in an ethnical manner. I used rigorous reflexivity in the design, data collection, data analyses, and write-up of this study.

It is important to note that Southeast Asian American students at both universities were eager to participate in this research study. As will be seen in the findings, many students developed an awareness of Southeast Asian American educational struggles during college and wanted to be part of this study in order to advance the scholarship on Southeast Asian American students. Many students expressed their gratitude for the work I was doing, and they were thankful to be sharing their stories because they wanted their voices heard in the university. For several students, this was the first time their stories were being validated in an educational setting. Several students became emotional talking about their experiences; one student broke down in tears before our interview began because she was so thankful that someone was finally acknowledging her voice and her lived experiences as a low-income, first-generation college student, second-generation Cambodian American. The next four chapters discuss the findings of this study, including the voices of these students.

Chapter 5

Findings

Overview

These next four chapters present the findings to each of the research questions that guided this study:

5) What were the pathways that led Southeast Asian American students to academically rigorous universities?
6) Who or what provides support to students, and who or what causes difficulties for students?
7) How do Southeast Asian American students experience campus racial climate, and how does the campus racial climate affect students' experiences at their university?
8) To what extent are culturally validating environments available to students at their university, and how do these environments support students' multiple worlds?

Since I used a case study approach in design of this research, I begin by discussing the notable differences between Southeast Asian American students' experiences at Coral Tree University versus Redwood University.

Comparing Southeast Asian American Students' Experiences at Coral Tree University and Redwood University. Students' experiences at both universities were not drastically different, but there were differences in their experiences nonetheless. As described in the previous chapter, Coral Tree University was surrounded by a predominantly white community and white students comprised the highest percentage of the student body at the university; Redwood University was located near large Asian American communities and Asian American and Pacific Islander students comprised the highest percentage of the

student body at the university. Students at Redwood University had more access to culturally relevant community organizations, more access to Southeast Asian American faculty and staff members, a library archive dedicated to Southeast Asian ethnic groups and communities, and a centralized campus outreach and retention center. Therefore, I conclude that students at Redwood University had more access to culturally validating people and spaces as compared to students at Coral Tree University. In terms of the campus environment, students at Redwood University focused on the campus racial climate as they experienced it on campus, while students at Coral Tree University talked about the campus racial climate in regards to their campus as well as in the neighboring community where the majority of students resided. This is where many of the students experienced the incidents of racism and racial microaggressions that they described. Also, the findings suggested that students at Redwood University did not experience as hostile of a climate as the students at Coral Tree University, who were more likely to experience blatant racism and rampant racial microaggressions from white students in their community. These experiences are discussed in more depth in chapter 7.

Profiles of Students and Their Pathways to the University

This section provides an overview of student participants from Redwood University and Coral Tree University. Each profile highlights students' educational pathway to higher education, their background, home communities, and/or their experiences at their university. Stories and experiences that were deemed unique to the individual or most salient in the student's experience were emphasized, but I must stress that these are mere glimpses of students' experiences. Also, topics that would be covered in future chapters were not, or only minimally, covered in student profiles to avoid repetition.

Coral Tree University.

Student profiles from Coral Tree University are organized by their most salient ethnic identity and then listed in alphabetical order.

Vietnamese American.

Beth. Beth was a second-generation Vietnamese American, 4th year student at Coral Tree University. She was raised in a Vietnamese American ethnic enclave and had mainly Vietnamese friends during elementary and middle school. Beth described it as, "It was just very Asian, I would say. Very, very Asian. Now when I go back to Orange County, when I go visit my parents, it's like a culture shock." For high school, Beth's parents enrolled her in a more diverse all-girls Catholic high school due to her uncle's suggestion. In fact, her parents moved her around to several different elementary and middle schools based on their friends' and family's opinions to ensure that she was enrolled in the best schools. Due to these frequent moves, Beth learned how to be adaptable and make friends quickly. Despite her high school being slightly more diverse than her elementary and middle schools, arriving at Coral Tree University was still a minor culture shock for Beth. She considered the university more racially diverse than her own community because of the variety of racial groups on campus; Beth was used to living in a predominantly Asian community.

Beth's parents invested heavily in their children's education, and Beth and her brothers had tutors throughout their school experience. Their mom would find tutors through Vietnamese newspapers, online, or through word of mouth. Her high school tutor was essential in helping her get to college; he edited her high school papers, edited her personal statements, and provided her with tips for taking her SATs. There was no doubt that Beth and

her brothers would attend college, and Beth was motivated to be successful because of her parents. She explained:

> My dad, he kind of gave me the motivation to kind of pursue what I wanted to do. Yea. He was just very – a very hard workingman. He owned a jewelry shop down in Burbank – or up in Burbank. He would drive like two hours, three hours a day and I just saw how hard he worked. That's what made me want to pursue my future career. Just to give back to him also. Give back to my parents, yea…My mom, on the weekdays, she worked as a clerk or for like social services. On the weekend, she helped my dad. On the side, she also has a real estate agent. Yea, [giggles] she's like superwoman.

Beth was pursuing her biology degree because her dad encouraged her to become a doctor. Although Beth declared that she does not want to become a doctor, she aspired to earn her master's degree and become an optometrist. This revealed that Beth was unaware of the requirements for becoming an optometrist, which includes having to earn a doctor of optometry (O.D.) degree.

Table 9
Beth's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
Boyfriend
Housemates in college
Friends (pre-college)

Kim. Kim was a second-generation Vietnamese American, 3rd year student at Coral Tree University. Kim knew from young age that she was expected to attend college:

> Whenever I think back about it, there was never a moment where I was like, "Wait, I'm supposed to go to college?" It was always like, "Yea. College." And it certainly helped that a lot of my siblings are older than I am so by the time I was very conscious of school and education they were already in college so that was kind of like "Oh, that's the natural next step, because my older siblings did it so I will do it too."…I actually had two siblings who dropped out of college, but there was always that—that you could drop out of college and you could do that. But my mom was very adamant that they one day return to college or very adamant that that's not what

> I should aspire to be like, I should aspire to be like my oldest brother who finished college or like my other brothers who finished college.

Not only was it expected by her parents and her family that she would attend college, she also considered it expected by her community. Kim grew up in a Vietnamese American ethnic enclave, which also included a large Latino population. Due to the demographics of her community, she grew up believing all communities were as diverse as hers. Kim found comfort in living in a Vietnamese enclave because she considered it a very supportive environment. The expectation in the community was to satisfy your parents by going to college, a view that Kim and her friends adopted.

Kim had two major influences on her aspirations for college—her parents and her high school mentor. Kim's parents moved to the U.S. from Vietnam with five children, and Kim was born the year after they arrived. Her parents were reaching their sixties and still working to make ends meet. She was motivated to attend college and succeed in order to care for her parents like her siblings were doing. However, it was her mentor and friend that taught Kim about the value of going to college. She shared:

> So it's just like the pressure to attend a college would come from [my parents]. And then the pressure to kind of realize that college is what I make of it and I should want to attend a college to grow as a person and learn a lot about myself—not only just about school and different majors and subjects…he's a mentor but also my tennis coach as well.

He encouraged her to follow her own aspirations and gain the various benefits of attending college. She considered him "very inspiring and very encouraging."

When asked why she chose to attend Coral Tree University, Kim admitted that she realized that her visit with the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program was a misrepresentation of the university. During the visit, Kim became separated from her group and was guided by some kind students; they were students of color and were very

welcoming. Due to these interactions, Kim left with a positive perception of Coral Tree University. Once she submitted her statement of intent to register, Kim learned that it was a heavily white student body and had a reputation of being a party school. Kim struggled with the ethnocentric views in her communication major and the frequent assaults of racial microaggressions from other students in her classes. These experienced helped inspire her aspirations to earn her bachelor's, and likely her master's, to become a student affairs professional focusing on Asian American student retention. These aspirations were also solidified when Kim successfully organized a high school outreach program through her Vietnamese Club. She described her accomplishment:

> It was really kind of the most satisfying thing I've ever done…I don't know, doing that, and specifically reaching out to Orange County high schools, including my own high school, was just really empowering and was kind of like a reminder of how important community is. Because I know that from that the program, both the leaders, the workshop heads, and the students really felt empowered and really felt supported by one another. It wasn't just the leader providing the support to students but it was students giving back the support. And so, just that program made me realize that these kinds of things are things I want to do after I graduate from school and I want to do the on a more administrative level.

Kim was an active student leader at Coral Tree University and became a mentor to many Southeast Asian American students on campus.

Table 10
Kim's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
Neighborhood
College
Clubs/organizations
Housemates in college
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)

Jeff. Jeff was a second-generation Vietnamese American, 3rd year student at Coral Tree University. During senior year of high school, Jeff's parents allowed him to take a road trip with his friends to visit all of the colleges he had been accepted to. He wrote on his survey:

> This was my first time away from home without my parents and my first taste of freedom…This is when I grew to realize how important school would become, because I would be doing it all on my own. When filling out this survey, I realized my entire college experience and education is solely what I make it to be. The trip prepared myself for college and ultimately decided to attend [Coral Tree University].

This sense of independence continued to grow while Jeff was at Coral Tree University, and he felt that the university allowed him to grow into the person he wanted to be.

Growing up, Jeff's education was partially shaped by an older cousin who served as cultural brokers for Jeff's parents. He shared, "My parents don't really speak English, or they don't really know the American traditions. They're kinda just, they're very traditional Vietnamese." For this reason, they relied on Jeff's older cousin who had gone to college and had a successful career to help with their educational decisions. One example included sending Jeff to a charter high school. After attending an informational session in which the school guaranteed college acceptance, his parents and cousin decided to enroll Jeff in the charter school instead of the public school path with his friends. Jeff was unhappy and had a hard time making friends; he struggled with the fact that there were very few Asian students who attended the school. Jeff confided in his older brother, and his older brother was able to advocate for Jeff to their parents. After a few months, they decided to enroll him into the public high school with his friends, a decision he said, "really kinda changed my life."

While Jeff was motivated to be successful in life in order to give back to his parents, his older brothers and older cousin set the examples for attending college. Both of his older

brothers graduated from state colleges, and one served in the U.S. Marines prior to finishing his bachelor's degree. He encouraged Jeff to consider this option, but Jeff was very adamant that he did not want to take that path. All three of them were very encouraging of Jeff and supported his college-going process in any way they were able to. Jeff discussed his cousin's role in this process:

> My cousin was always just the person that took, like… because you know how like your parents are supposed to do your financial aid and all that—that was my cousin's role, basically making sure I had all the financial and, make sure that the school was right for me. He actually came with me to orientation and everything.

They were important role models for him to look up to.

Jeff aspired to earn his master's and become an optometrist, although he knew his parents wanted him to earn his master's and become a pharmacist. Despite the mismatch, there was no conflict between Jeff and his parents. They had a communicative relationship, which had improved since Jeff left home for college, and his parents were supportive of the decisions he made. Similar to his friend, Beth, there was a disconnect between the degrees they wanted to earn and the careers they aspired to. Both careers in optometry and pharmacy require earning doctorate degrees, but Jeff believed he only needed a master's degree. This was a critical time for Jeff to learn about the process and degrees necessary for becoming a pharmacist to ensure he was pursuing a path he wanted.

Table 11
Jeff's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
Clubs/organizations

Sara. Sara was a second-generation Vietnamese/Chinese American, 4th year student at Coral Tree University. She arrived at Coral Tree as a sociology major and was an inspired by an Asian American Studies professor during her first quarter of college, and she decided she wanted to be him. Sara added a double major in Asian American Studies and aspired to become a lawyer just like her professor. The aspirations to become a lawyer did not last longer than the academic year, because Sara did not enjoy her sociology classes. She explained:

> I just thought they really boring. I hated the readings for them, and then, I thought about it, too, and I was – because people that go into law school major in like philosophy, and English, and political science – and I hate those, and history, and I hate all those classes.

On the contrary, Sara really enjoyed her Asian American Studies classes, so she kept the major and added another double major in financial math. During her freshman and sophomore year, Sara had been taking math classes for fun, so her boyfriend encouraged her to consider majoring in math.

Her aspirations were to earn her bachelor's degree but work on earning her certifications to become a financial analyst, which she considered the top tier of the financial industry. Sara developed these aspirations through her current internship at a financial office. She planned to continue interning through the summer after her graduation in order to study for her first set of exams, but was unsure whether she would be hired on as an employee since there were 10 interns and only 1 position open. Sara explained, "I'm not sure if I'll work there, but I'm moving to [the city], because at home, I think I would— my parents own a restaurant— so, I think I would just be working at the restaurant and not trying to find a real job." Compared to her younger brothers, Sara considered herself the most dutiful and would therefore want to help her parents at their family restaurant; she feared losing her

motivation if she moved home. However, Sara was very motivated to complete college in order to provide a pathway for her siblings and to give back to her parents. She explained, "I do things so that my brothers and sisters can follow in my footsteps, and yea, and then, I do things for my parents, so that they can be proud of me."

Sara grew up in a predominantly white and Latino community, but her family was part of a fairly large Vietnamese Catholic community. They were well-connected to the ethnic community because Sara's parents owned the only pho restaurant in the area for a number of years. Unhappy with the schools in their neighborhood, her parents moved her around different schools in order to find ones with the best resources for her education. They listed her grandmother's address and made the 15-minute commute each day. The downside of attending these well-resourced schools near wine vineyards, according to Sara, was that they were predominantly white and she experienced a lot of racism from the other children. She admitted that it was a difficult experience, but "mostly ok." During high school, Sara participated in a magnet program through her high school and enrolled in the local junior college to earn her college credits. Due to this, she entered Coral Tree University in sophomore standing.

Table 12
Sara's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
Neighborhood
College
Housemates in college
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
Boyfriend

Tom. Tom was a 1.5-generation Vietnamese American, 3rd year student at Coral Tree University. His family migrated to the U.S. from Vietnam when was Tom was two years old. Tom had a lot of admiration for his mother's success as an immigrant. She spoke very little English when they arrived in the U.S. and worked minimum wage jobs to help support the family. Despite these obstacles, she worked her way through college and medical school to become a physician. For this reason, Tom believed that college was an expectation and not an option. He said:

> So, she basically learned all of medicine in eight years, in English. So, she did it, and our lives improved significantly. It wasn't the money so much, but it was the fact that she was able to move away from my dad's parents. We used to live all together—our entire family in one huge house.

His family moved to Texas for his mom's residency and then settled near Sacramento, California. Tom had always lived near ethnic enclaves—in Texas, he lived in a predominantly Latino community, and near Sacramento, he lived near a predominantly Vietnamese community. Although Tom had mostly Asian American friends in Sacramento, he also started making white friends for the first time. He explained:

> That's when I started really assimilating into American culture. I always felt I was— I knew I was an immigrant. But, once I was in Sacramento I realized I could actually be an American, and have friends, and do normal things…I only had two good, white friends, but all of my other friends were Asian, but they were friends with the white kids. And they'd already made that transition that I was following into the same path.

Tom seemed to think that he had to be either Vietnamese or American, and he chose to be American. He was critical of ethnic enclaves and considered them "isolated." This also corresponded with his views of ethnic clubs and organizations on college campuses, arguing that students should not limit themselves to only having friends of the same ethnicity.

Not only was Tom motivated by his mother's successes, he was also motivated by his father's failures. He had little respect for his father, who continued living in a Vietnamese

enclave after his parents' divorce, learned very little English, and worked minimum wage jobs for 30 years before moving back to Vietnam. Although Tom had recently begun rebuilding his relationship with his father, he worked very hard to become the opposite of him. Instead, he saw his aunt as a second parental figure and considered her more motherly and nurturing than his own mother—who he considers a "tiger mother." He relied on both his aunt and mother for emotional and academic support.

Adamant that he was not following in his mother's footsteps, Tom explained that he developed his aspirations to become a doctor (MD or DO) without his parents' influence. He briefly considered becoming a musician but feared the financial struggle; his mother also encouraged him to reconsider the idea. Tom's aspirations to become a doctor were solidified when he spent the summer after his sophomore year participating in a medical mission with physicians who set up clinics throughout Vietnam. Tom described his experience:

> It was a really fulfilling experience. That's when I knew I had to become a doctor. I knew I wanted to do it, but once I got my hands dirty and worked with them, it changed everything. Once I came back, my motivation just shot through the roof. I've been trying to get a lab position for a very long time. I wanted to do research, because I just love learning…It's all part of a bigger picture. But, at the same time, I genuinely love everything that I'm doing.

Tom was doing all he could to prepare himself for medical school, including joining a pre-med fraternity at Coral Tree University.

Table 13
Tom's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
College
Housemates in college
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
Clubs/organizations
Music

Cambodian American.

Isabel. Isabel was a second-generation Cambodian American, 4th year student at Coral Tree University. Her family and friends expected her to attend college; it was looked down upon in her community to not attend college. Isabel's father attended trade school and worked as an engineering technician and her mother earned her bachelor's degree in business administration. She was currently back in school to pursue her interests in the health field. Isabel described how she admired her mother's persistence:

> I'm just like, "You know what? Go you!" I really look up to my mother, because I feel just—I guess, in contrast to a lot of immigrants coming here, that's not the route they would take. It's really amazing to me that she came here over—firstly, no English and she just learned. And she just jumped into college, and she was able to obtain her degree. It's a real struggle, even for me, so I can't imagine it for her. And for her to go back to college to really do what she wants to do, I think, that's really—that's really something.

Her mother was also instrumental in encouraging Isabel to apply for and attend a research university. Isabel did not think she was cut out for a research university; she had low self-confidence in high school and felt that her friends were more exceptional than her. For this reason, Isabel planned to attend a community college before transferring to a local state university, but with her mother's encouragement, she decided to give Coral Tree University a chance. Isabel did not regret this decision, because she learned how to step out of her comfort zone and gained more self-confidence at Coral Tree University.

Isabel entered college as a biochemistry major with the advice of her uncle, who encouraged her to choose the most practical major for securing a stable career after graduation. However, she struggled in her courses and quickly learned in her first year that this was not the path she wanted to pursue. Isabel felt a little lost because she had never considered majoring in anything other than the hard sciences when she planned for college.

At the advice and encouragement of her writing professor, Isabel explored classes in the social sciences and humanities. She enrolled in an introduction to Sociology course and fell in love with the major. After completing her bachelor's degree, Isabel aspired for a career in human resources because of her current position as a supervisor in the campus computer labs. She said, "I really love my job, and I love working with people." Although she has considered graduate school, Isabel felt burnt out and would like more work experience before returning to school. She felt fortunate that her parents were supportive of whatever she decided to pursue:

> My dad is very supportive in any decision I make, and he's all about whatever makes you happy. He's really just like that really chill dad. He's just like, you do you. This is your life. You've got to do what you want to do. My mom is very—she really believes in both my sister and me, which is really nice. And so, because she feels so confident in us she doesn't want to box me in any one career.

Isabel's mother experienced pressure from her family to pursue a degree in business administration for financial security, so she did not place those same expectations on her children.

Coral Tree University also provided Isabel with the opportunity to explore her identities. She grew up in a community that was predominantly Asian Americans, Latino, and African Americans and had very few white families. The move to Coral Tree University opened her eyes to the realities within her community. When she visited home, Isabel paid more attention to the violence, gang activity, and drug deals that were happening in her community. She said, "The place I grew up in – a lot of people were just getting by, I realized. Growing up with it, I didn't see it." Isabel developed an awareness of her socioeconomic status. Not only this, college became a space for Isabel to explore her Khmer identity. She did not grow up near a Cambodian community and she felt that her own family

had become "Americanized." These experiences will be discussed in more depth in future chapters.

Table 14
Isabel's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
College
Clubs/organizations
Sports teams
Housemates in college
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)

Jack. Jack was a second-generation Cambodian American, 4th year student at Coral Tree University. He entered college as an Asian American Studies major and added a minor in applied psychology after working with students with disabilities at the Children's Center. During his childhood, his father decided to move the family away from Long Beach because he felt it was too dangerous and opened a donut shop in Bakersfield. Growing up near the Central Valley of California, Jack felt isolated from an Asian American community. He described his community as low-income but full of hardworking families. The community was primarily Latino but also had white and black families. For this reason, Jack often felt like he was the only Asian American student in his schools, and he decided that he wanted to learn more about his identity during college. Jack said:

> I chose Asian American Studies because one—I didn't grow up with Asian Americans or Asians at all. I was the only Asian American in my community…Then as I wanted to go to college I wanted to learn about my heritage and people of Asia, because being the only one in my community made me different but it made me stronger too.

Jack took advantage of several different outlets at Coral Tree University to explore his Asian American identity in addition to being an Asian American Studies major—he also joined an

Asian-interest fraternity, lived on the Asian American/Pacific Islander floor in the dorms, and became the culture night coordinator for the Cambodian Club.

Jack's father, siblings, and older cousins were very supportive of him and his aspirations. Five of his six older siblings had attended college and his cousins were already in college while Jack was in high school, so it was expected that Jack would attend college. Even though half of his siblings encouraged him to stay home and attend the local four-year state college, Jack was determined to get out of the community and meet more people—especially Asian American people. While Jack wrote on his survey that he aspired to earn his master's and enter the corporate world or real estate, he shared in his interview that he intended to enter the Peace Corps after graduation. Jack was inspired by a friend who was currently stationed with the Peace Corps in Mongolia, and he hoped to be placed near Cambodia so he could visit the country for the first time. His father and siblings were supportive of this decision and gave him their approval. Likely related to his desire to join the Peace Corps, Jack revealed in his interview that he also intended to enter a master's program in either applied psychology or social work at a local state colleges, and he already started looking into programs that he would apply to. Although Jack's aspirations originally differed from his family's aspirations, he explained why he diverged from their aspirations:

> At the beginning they wanted me to be a pediatrician, or a doctor, or something big. But then after a while, they stopped caring. They told me to do whatever you want now. Because maybe I was always the rebellious one, not always. But I always did my work, I was always the top of my class, always on honor roll. It really wasn't anything special for me because my siblings were all like that too, like top of their class. It was expected. For me, I just want to do whatever I want to do. In the beginning, I wanted to become a pediatrician and such…but I don't want to do that. My brother does that (electrical engineer). I really want to do something different and like focus, I like helping people and I was always in those leadership programs. Even now I still enjoy doing that and working at the school.

As the second youngest child of the family, Jack felt fortunate that he could follow his own aspirations in the way that his siblings were not able to. His older siblings either attended a local university or did not attend college in order to work and support the family and their father, who was almost 70 years old.

Table 15
Jack's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
Neighborhood
College
Housemates in college
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
Clubs/organizations
Academic support programs
Music

Lily. Lily was a 1.5 generation Cambodian American, 2nd year student at Coral Tree University. Lily arrived in the U.S. at the age of 10 with her mother, after being separated from her father for two years. He had been sponsored to the U.S. by her older cousins and worked in their family restaurant as a cook. Lily was inspired by her older cousins, because they were educated and owned successful businesses. She was driven to be as successful as them in order to support her parents. On her survey, she wrote:

> I guess the number one reason why I've pushed myself thus far is because I see my dad, who has very little education and cannot speak English, working for them. I would like to pursue the highest education possible in order to get a well-paid job and help my parents financially.

Lily was determined not to end up in a job that required the same kind of demanding physical labor required of her father. For this reason, she aspired to earn her Ph.D. and work for an international company or in an embassy. She has also considered teaching in a Cambodian

university, because she felt so much respect for her professors. After entering Coral Tree University as a biology major on her path to becoming a pharmacist like her father had hoped for, Lily learned that she disliked the field and chose to become a global studies major and minor in Spanish. Lily wanted to become trilingual in order to be more competitive for jobs.

After not being accepted to her first choice university, Lily chose Coral Tree rather than the four-year state college near her home because she wanted to learn how to be independent from her parents. Her parents accepted this decision because the university was a reasonable distance from home. Lily admitted that she was surprised how different the demographics were between her home community and Coral Tree University; she was used to living in a very diverse community with a lot of Latinos, African Americans, and Cambodians. Lily explained:

> When I came to [Coral Tree University] and it was mostly Caucasian, at first I was like, "Oh wow. I'm kind of intimidated, because this is very different." But you kind of get used to it…And I like it here a lot, I have to admit.

She also loved being at Coral Tree University because of the freedom she had. Lily's parents were very traditional and conservative and expected her to be as well. She explained how she navigated these different spaces:

> It's like two different worlds kind of thing. When I go home I act a certain way, and then when I'm here with my friends, I'm like a different way…I don't go home that often and when I do, I just- the fact that I see my parents, I automatically just switch modes.

With this freedom, Lily started exploring her social options. She admitted that she spent most of her first and second year focused on academics and not making an effort to be more involved in campus activities. In an effort to challenge herself and try new experiences, Lily decided to start joining different organizations and look for more volunteer opportunities. At the time of the interview, Lily was rushing to join an Asian-interest sorority.

Table 16
Lily's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Other family
Extended Family
Neighborhood
Housemates in college
Religious place of worship
College
Clubs/organizations
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
Community service
Music

Sophia. Sophia was a second-generation Cambodian American, 2nd year student at Coral Tree University. She entered college knowing she did not want to pursue a STEM degree because she did not want to struggle through her major. Sophia entered as a political science major because of her interests in history and government and added a minor in Asian American Studies after taking a course on *Asian American Gender and Sexuality*. She said, "I wanted to learn more about Asian Americans and their presence here in the United States." This was important to Sophia when she entered college, because she felt she had not had the opportunity to connect with her culture or her Cambodian identity while she was growing up. Not only did Sophia add the minor in Asian American Studies, she actively searched Facebook for the presence of a Cambodian Club at Coral Tree University. She never had Cambodian friends prior to college, and she strongly desired to be part of an ethnic community. Although Sophia's parents still practiced Cambodian cultural traditions within their own home, she explained, "My parents, they're not really the social type, so they weren't really looking for communities themselves. They were just trying to make it." Her parents' focus was on survival, because neither of them were currently employed.

Sophia grew up in a predominantly Chinese and Vietnamese community where other families were of a higher socioeconomic status than her family. She had three older siblings who were all first-generation; her two oldest siblings arrived in the U.S. during high school age. Two of her three siblings completed college, and all three live at home to help support their parents. When asked whether Sophia was expected to return home after college to help support the family as well, she replied:

> I'm not really sure. My parents always say you should succeed for yourself and get out of here so you don't get stuck with us. They don't really expect it too much, because um, well I'm the youngest and I think that to them it might seem a little crazy to depend on me and then also um, my mom didn't really raise me that much. I had a caregiver when I was little so I don't think she expects me to contribute back to the family, but I mean, I'm going to. It's the right thing to do.

Despite her belief that she was not expected to help support the family as the youngest child, Sophia felt a strong sense of filial piety. She defined success as her ability to be able to take care of her own needs as well as her parents'. With this definition in mind, Sophia aspired to earn her juris doctorate and become a lawyer. These aspirations were inspired by her family's immigration lawyer, as she would make frequent visits to his office with her parents as a child. She said, "I just remember seeing him and he loves talking about his career and trying to convince people that they should also do law, so I kind of picked up on that."

Sophia's college experience has been important for expanding her experiences and her views of people, especially white people. Joining the intramural rugby team at Coral Tree University introduced Sophia to a very diverse group of friends. Prior to coming to college, she had very little experience with white people beyond being classmates and she never really had white friends. Joining rugby has helped her move beyond her perceptions of white people "all being the same" and allowed her to see that there are white people who have an understanding and appreciation of other cultures. Finding friends who were understanding of

her culture and her background was very important to Sophia, and she felt more comfortable with these friends.

Table 17
Sophia's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Neighborhood
College
Clubs/organizations
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
Sports teams
Music

Hmong American.

Anna. Anna was a second-generation Hmong American, 2nd year student at Coral Tree University. As a child, her parents and older brothers regularly shared stories about the struggles of their life in Laos during the Vietnam War as motivation for her to "strive for better." Anna shared, "That's where I got that focus from. They struggle so hard to just have a roof over our head. So, why not do something better, and later in life return their favor to them?" In her survey, Anna wrote that her mom and dad have been most influential in her education. She wrote about her father:

> My entire childhood, I never saw him as often because he worked mid-shift (from 3pm-12am). It brings me to tears every time I write about my dad because I see him suffer every time and there's really nothing I can do. My dad's been through many hardships and I no longer want him to suffer anymore. I always told myself that I NEED to succeed in life so I can finally support him instead of him supporting me all the time.

Her family was an incredible support system for Anna, and she used this as motivation for her success. Anna aspired to earn her medical degree and become a pediatrician. This was inspired by the birth of one of her nieces, who required emergency surgery due to a heart

condition. From this experience, Anna learned that she wanted to care for children, especially because she had seven nieces and nephews. Her family was very happy and proud that she developed these aspirations to become a doctor.

Anna had a choice between Redwood University and Coral Tree University when she was deciding on universities. She admitted that she wanted to try living away from an Asian American community, and Redwood University was too far away from home. Anna also revealed that her boyfriend was part of the reason she chose to attend Coral Tree, because he lived in a town an hour away from the university. Despite choosing Coral Tree because she wanted to try living away from an Asian community, Anna soon realized that she wanted to be near a community and a place that felt more like home. She had been very homesick. After her freshman year in the dorms, Anna decided to move to the nearby town and live with her boyfriend. This town had a small, close-knit Hmong community which her boyfriend and his family were part of. Since a female moving into town to be with her boyfriend went against Hmong customs, the community was very critical of Anna. This affected Anna emotionally for some time, because she knew she had moved into the area because of college. These criticisms dissipated after her boyfriend's uncle voiced his support for Anna at a family gathering and commended her for her educational pursuits.

Table 18
Anna's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Other family
Extended Family
College
Friends (pre-college)
Religion
Music
Goals

Evelyn. Evelyn was a second-generation Hmong American, 4th year student at Coral Tree University. She attributed the reason she was in college to her AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination) and Upward Bound counselors, programs she had been involved in since middle school. Not only did these programs assist her with college applications and college tours during her senior year, several counselors also supported and guided her through the emotional struggles of choosing to attend a university away from home. Evelyn is one of seven children in her family, and the first to attend a four-year research university and leave home. This was a shock to her parents, who had assumed Evelyn would attend the local four-year state college, and her father pushed hard to convince her to stay home. Her father worried about the financial burden that would be placed on her, as well as the fears of what would happen to their youngest daughter living away from home—to which she sarcastically said, "That I was gonna get pregnant, obviously." Evelyn described how she came close to changing her decision after breaking the news to her father:

> So we were in the car one day and my dad said, "Oh, you know when you go to Fresno State," and I just told myself this is the time to tell him. I said, "Dad, I'm not going to Fresno State," and it was quiet. I panicked a little and said, "Well, I'm going to [Coral Tree University]." So he offered to pay for my dorms for me to get out of the dorms. He was willing to pay whatever for me to not come here. So it was really, at that point I really had doubt in myself…So I emailed my Upward Bound counselors…I said, "…I don't know what to do, I'm having second thoughts," and my family – I would say my family supported me, it was mostly my dad that didn't like me coming here. So she ended up emailing the two other counselors and they all emailed me that day, and I'll always remember her saying that if they didn't see potential in me they wouldn't have accepted me.

Evelyn stood by her decision with the encouragement of her counselors, and her father eventually accepted her decision.

Evelyn chose Coral Tree University based on the campus and community environment. She compared it to her home community, "You just really felt like I could

never walk around Fresno at this hour and feel safe, so it was just that I felt safe here and I loved it." Evelyn described her community as dangerous and "really ghetto", and she never walked outside by herself. Despite this, Evelyn loved that she lived next door to her cousins and among a very large Hmong community. Her family still held on to their cultural traditions, and she described that almost every weekend was "a lot of gatherings and ceremonies—like babies being born, marriages, funerals, graduations…and it was men doing meat, women doing veggies." This was a major aspect of her community that Evelyn missed while she was at Coral Tree University. As part of this conversation, Evelyn shared that she was unsure of whether her parents would throw her a graduation party in the summer. She said, "I don't know if my parents honestly would be proud of presenting me as a feminist studies major in my community, so that's a really big factor for me." Evelyn aspired to work with women and children and possibly become a childbirth educator, which she thought was important for the Hmong community. This was a source of conflict between Evelyn and her parents, because they did not understand her aspirations and were concerned about her financial future. Her parents desired for her to become a nurse or earn her Ph.D. While she was disappointed and hurt by her father's reaction after telling him her major, she described her the pride she had in herself:

> Not that I feel like a disappointment, because I feel like I'm doing this for me. If I'm just getting my bachelor's, that's for me. Like, I'm sorry if you're not proud of me because I just have a bachelor's, but no one's ever gone to a [research university], so I'm really proud of that.

Even though Evelyn respected her parents and wanted to make them proud, she learned to follow her own aspirations, even when it meant going against her parents' expectations.

Table 19
Evelyn's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Other family
Extended family
Neighborhood
Housemates in college
College
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
Clubs/organizations
Academic support programs
Music

Lao American.

Adam. Adam was a second-generation Lao American, 4th year transfer student at Coral Tree University. During his senior year of high school, Adam started but never completed his applications to four-year universities. For financial reasons, he decided he wanted to complete his lower division classes at a community college before transferring to a four-year university. Despite his parents' disapproval and impatience, Adam spent four years in community college trying to figure out a major and career path. His parents constantly questioned him on when he was planning to transfer, especially because they lived near a four-year state college. Adam still felt lost and considered taking a year off of school after his third year at the community college, but he feared his parents' reaction. His sister had already decided to leave college before graduating, and he wanted to avoid the wrath that she received from their parents. Eventually, Adam used the Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) program to transfer to Coral Tree University because he wanted to attend a school away from home. He shared his reasons for not choosing to attend the four-year state college near his family's home:

> I don't want to go there because I feel like I'm going to run into more people I know from high school. That was like the number one thing I didn't want to do— to transfer to a university that everyone goes to. I want to try to start a new life. Be open.

Adam decided that Coral Tree University was a far enough distance to learn to become independent.

Adam entered as a biological anthropology major but wanted to change his major after taking a math class. He knew he had always loved math and even earned a 5 on the AP Calculus test. However, Adam met with a counselor and learned that it would take him an extra year to complete the math major, so he decided to stay an anthropology major that focused on statistics. When asked why he felt he had to graduate from Coral Tree in two years, he responded, "Because my parents are funding me. They're paying for my tuition. Tuition is expensive. I don't want to take that much time." Adams was completely financially dependent on his parents, so he felt he had to honor their wishes. Unfortunately, Adam was still unsure of what he wanted to do with his future. He aspired to earn his Ph.D., but his response revealed how Adam was still unsure of his path:

> I feel like because all I want to be is successful. I feel like the higher chance to be successful is getting the highest level of degree you can get. Ph.D. sounds reasonable. I'm not exactly sure what I want to do with a Ph.D. It feels like research is my only option to do in this major. I could branch off and do something else. I want to digress from anthropology—to biology pretty much. I want to learn more about genetic stuff, and work on genetic stuff. I'm more interested about genes.

Adam feared the future because of its uncertainty. He wanted to attend graduate school, but it was clear from his comment above that he did not fully understand what graduate school would be or lead to. Another major concern was how he was going to finance his graduate degree since his parents were only funding his bachelor's degree. Once he graduated, Adam would have to start learning how to be financially independent from his parents, and this seemed to produce some anxiety about his future.

Table 20
Adam's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
College
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
Music

Redwood University.

Student profiles from Redwood University are organized by their most salient ethnic identity and then listed in alphabetical order.

Vietnamese American.

Amelia. Amelia was a second-generation Vietnamese American, 2nd year student at Redwood University. Even though she and her parents never discussed whether she was expected to attend college after high school, she knew the expectation existed in the silence. Amelia had been given a lot of independence since she was young, and her parents placed a lot of trust in her decisions. During high school, Amelia assumed she was continuing into higher education since her older cousins had attended college and all of her friends were planning to attend college. She was raised in a small community with primarily Chinese American families; Amelia described it as a community that expected their children to attend high-ranking, prestigious universities and earn a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) degree. She and her friends also adopted these aspirations.

Amelia's dream was to attend a university outside of California, so she aspired to attend Boston University. However, Amelia gave up on her dream to attend Boston University due to an unimpressive financial aid package and reluctantly chose the more appealing package from Redwood University. She feared reliving the high school experience

since so many of her former classmates attended Redwood University. During this application process, she relied heavily on the advice and guidance of her high school counselor, who Amelia credited as being most influential in her getting to college. Amelia met with the counselor frequently to discuss her aspirations, where she would go for college, and how she was going to get there. Another valuable mentor during this process was her 8th grade club advisor, who Amelia stayed friends with during high school. Her advisor was a history teacher who shared what it was like to be a history major and how she chose her career path. These experiences inspired Amelia to consider a career in teaching, so she also entered Redwood University as a history major who added Asian American Studies as a double major during her second year.

The aspirations to become a teacher only lasted through her first year of college. Amelia participated in a mentorship program in a local high school during her first year and quickly realized she did not want to become a classroom teacher but knew she wanted to remain in education. After serendipitously meeting a friend's sister who was pursuing a student affairs position, Amelia discovered her new career path. Previously not knowing that student affairs was a field she could enter, Amelia set out to understand all she could about the field. She actively sought out and requested lunch meetings with different student affairs professionals to learn more about their positions. While Amelia had a lot of passion for program and event planning, she was also motivated to help students learn about resources available on campuses. She planned to earn her master's degree and work with students in a high school or college setting. Amelia explained her reason for pursuing these goals:

> I feel like there are a lot of resources on campus that a lot of students don't utilize. We don't even know where it is to begin with. So I really want to be working in a resource center or working at one of the campus resources and

> trying to outreach to campus to make them more aware of what's going on and everything also.

Only in her second year at Redwood University, Amelia had already immersed herself into several different activities and organizations on campus that would prepare her to work in student affairs after graduating. Her many involvements will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Table 21
Amelia's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Clubs/organizations
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
College

Chloe. Chloe was a second-generation Vietnamese/Chinese/Cambodian American, 2nd year student at Redwood University. She felt a profound sense of responsibility to succeed and earn a college degree for her family, especially her mom. During the interview, Chloe became very emotional when discussing how proud she wanted to make her parents, and it was always expected that she would attend college. Her father worked as a machine operator and her mother owned a nail salon. She considered herself "Chinese-Cambodian, culturally Vietnamese" because her parents were raised in Vietnam and followed Vietnamese cultural traditions; Vietnamese, Cantonese, and English were all spoken in her home. Chloe's family was fortunate to be able to afford any resources she needed that would make her competitive for college applications. Her mother followed suit of Chloe's older cousins and peers and enrolled her in activities such as music lessons and test preparation programs.

Chloe's academic and career aspirations were developed since high school. She knew she wanted to enter the tech industry, but decided in her senior year that she was also

interested in business. Chloe often worked with her mom on projects for the nail salon—helping her with graphic design, marketing, and general business duties, so this inspired her to pursue the field. She focused on applying to research universities in California and knew that Redwood University was the right fit for her. The business information management major combined both fields of computer science and business, and she learned that Redwood was located near a large technology industry, which meant more opportunities for internships. Since the major already combined both of her interests, Chloe had room to pursue a minor in international studies, focusing on international business. Although Chloe has already considered attending graduate school to pursue her MBA, she planned to gain experience in the business world before deciding whether she needed the graduate degree. Chloe developed this academic pathway through individual research but wished that she had been provided with more resources and support from her high school about the college-going process. For this reason, she participated in outreach programs that would help high school students learn about resources that she wished she had.

Chloe was honest at the start of the interview that she was apprehensive about participating due to her academic struggles. She shared:

> I'm going to be totally, totally honest with you because I think I'm all about doing retention on campus and kind of helping—like, I'm involved with high school outreach and kind of in this world. But at the same time, I have my own problems – trying to be retained in this university, and I think when it comes down to academics, it's like really – it's a really, really tough spot for me because it's something that I'm still struggling with to kind of find this balance of not being too involved, which I'm learning finally, and then kind of focusing more on the academic side.

Chloe's involvement in clubs and organizations has been integral to her college experience. She was involved in six different clubs and organizations as well as participating in various outreach programs that were run through these organizations. Only in her second year, Chloe

quickly learned that she needed to find a better balance of her campus involvements and focusing on her academics in order to raise her grade point average.

Table 22
Chloe's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
College
Housemates in college
Clubs/organizations
Friends (from college)
Academic support programs
Music

Ethan. Ethan was a second-generation Vietnamese American, 4th year student attending Redwood University. He was acknowledged as an incredible mentor to several other students who participated in this study and was a strong advocate for the Southeast Asian American community at Redwood University. This commitment to helping others developed because he felt lucky to have been guided by excellent mentors during his youth and he wanted to pay it forward. Ethan was born and raised in a low-income community in northern California that was prone to gang violence. He described it as:

> During the time when my mother and older brother moved into the housing project, it was also recent refugees and immigrants as well. And also, during the times, like the 90s, drugs were very prevalent in the community and youth joining gangs. So I've kind of witnessed the different paths that people take either to the streets or to learning… I think overall, in the 90s, [my community] was a very violent place to live in.

These experiences caused Ethan to become an angry youth, but he learned to channel his anger through football. In addition to this, Ethan said, "I had a support system. I had two Polynesian mentors that helped me identify my dreams and their advice of continuing

education and giving back to the community." Due to this support system of his mother, brothers, and community mentors, Ethan discovered which path he wanted to pursue.

During high school, Ethan learned about higher education through a community service organization that encouraged him to attend a summer institute for Southeast Asian high school students that was run by a Southeast Asian American student organization at UC Berkeley. On his survey, he said, "I was able to heal, reclaim my history, and empower myself and others in solidarity." After this experience, Ethan began to seriously consider college and his career path even though his mother had always encouraged him to attend college as a child. Despite feeling inspired, Ethan still held fears of what pursuing a college education and leaving his community would mean to others in his situation:

> One of my fears of continuing education is that people might see me as being better than them, yea, and that I'll never recognize where I come from kind of thing. Like I know how challenging it is being part of that environment and some people don't want to come back, right.

Knowing this, Ethan was determined to return to work with his community after earning his bachelor's degree. He aspired to pursue his master's degree after returning home to spend some time with his family and become a school counselor. Ethan explained why he held these aspirations, "I wanted to pursue and continue that advocacy and dialogue within the refugee experiences and the commitment of recognizing who we are as people in the U.S."

One of the main reasons Ethan chose Redwood University was because of its proximity to a large Vietnamese enclave; this was an important factor because Ethan never grew up near an ethnic community and wanted to connect with his culture. Throughout his entire four years at Redwood University, Ethan developed into a well-respected mentor and leader among Southeast Asian American students. Not only did Ethan start the Southeast Asian Club at Redwood, he also developed a seminar aimed to support the retention of

Southeast Asian American freshmen and transfer students. Both of these projects will be discussed in more depth in subsequent chapters.

Table 23
Ethan's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Neighborhood
Clubs/organizations
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)

Henry. Henry was a second-generation Vietnamese American, 4th year student at Redwood University. For him, "it wasn't really a question of whether or not [he] was going to college, but where." Henry's family had a strong influence in his life, including a strong influence on his educational decisions. He attributed this to the fact that they are an Asian American family and made the assumption that all Asian Americans families operated this way. The expectation to attend college was also driven by his parents' educational success; Henry's parents met at the University of Iowa as recent immigrants to the U.S. His mom became a registered nurse and his dad a computer programmer. Due to their achievements, Henry grew up in an upper-middle class community that was predominantly white and had excellent schools. So excellent, that his aunt used their family's address to enroll Henry's cousin into his high school.

As the only one of his siblings to have been accepted into a research university, Henry's mother decided that he would attend Redwood University. With his mother's advice, Henry entered as a biomedical engineering/pre-med major because he grew up aspiring to become a doctor. He struggled in these classes during his first year and landed on academic probation. This prompted him to switch his major to biological sciences, but again, this

proved to be too challenging for Henry. During this period, Henry also considered leaving school for financial reasons; this will be discussed in the next chapter. These academic and financial struggles also coincided with the fact that Henry was determined to continue his community and volunteer work while in college, sometimes choosing these commitments over his academic work. Henry shared why he did not regret these decisions, "Just because most of the work I do, I am ... pretty confident in. I am proud of myself, and so I wouldn't change that." Much to the dismay of his parents and sisters, Henry decided he needed to let go of his aspirations to pursue the medical field.

When Henry decided it was time to reevaluate what his real interests and strengths were, he sought the help of academic counselors across campus to decide which major and career path was better suited for him. He was very proactive in utilizing resources on campus to help him make his decisions, but the ultimate decision was made on his own. During this time, Henry was also active in the social justice community and attending student activism conferences throughout the state. At one particular conference, Henry met a master's in social work candidate who immediately prompted Henry to consider the degree. Combining his skills from volunteering, event coordinating for community organizations, and his passion for social justice, Henry was now determined to earn his master's in social work and "bridge" the corporate world and social justice world by working in public relations and community outreach. Henry shared his philosophy, "There's a lot of different communities, and I feel like I come from multiple communities. And serving as that individual, I want to bridge them and network them together." Although supportive of his decisions, his parents held more conservative views than Henry and they struggled to understand his queer identity. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Table 24
Henry's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Queer community
Dance community
Social justice community
Friends (from college)
College
Clubs/organizations
Music

Cambodian American.

Grace. Grace was a second-generation Cambodian American, 4th year student at Redwood University. She fully acknowledged her identity as a low-income, first-generation college student, which shaped how she viewed her college experience. Grace was born and raised in southern California, and has lived in the same city her whole life. Growing up, her family lived in a part of town that she described as impoverished and dangerous—drug abuse and gang violence were a normal occurrence. Grace explained:

> When I was younger, my mom wouldn't let me go outside and play. Like, only if she was outside. We were only allowed like, not even outside our door to like, play handball…Honestly, I think when you're a kid, you just don't know. And I never knew; I was blind to those things. I never thought it was dangerous. I was like "Why can't I go outside? Why can't I see my friends?" 'Cause my friends all lived on the same block and I wanted to play with them. My mom was like "No, you're not going outside." I'm really happy that my mom protected me, but then when I grew older I realized, wow, there was a drug dealer next door. Like I didn't even know. And there were people in gangs that lived across the street; they're in like some Cambodian gang.

Her parents tried to shield her from these realities and always encouraged her to do well in school and go to college.

As she grew older, Grace became perceptive to the different paths that the youth in her neighborhood would take. She noticed that she was tracked into college-prep classes in

school and felt that she received more help and attention than other students who were not tracked onto the college path; she felt this was unfair. Grace believed that all of her friends and the youth in her community had the potential to be successful, but many of them did not receive the necessary support and resources to do well in school and continue onto college. She named several friends from her neighborhood that fell off the academic path during high school, and some of her friends faced extra challenges on their path to higher education due to their undocumented status. One of her close friends was deported to Mexico during high school. Due to her observations and experiences in her community, Grace aspired to earn her master's degree and become a youth counselor to support students' success.

Grace understood that she was fortunate to have the support of her parents, her two aunts, and her friends on her path to college. She considered her aunts most supportive of her aspirations, because her mom had a tendency to lecture her about completing house chores and learning to be a "responsible female" as a Cambodian woman. Grace considered herself and her aunts more "Americanized" than her mother, so her aunts' beliefs tended to align more closely with her own. Despite these struggles with her mother, Grace knew that her parents were proud of her accomplishments. Although they aspired for her to become a doctor, nurse or pharmacist because it's an "Asian thing" as Grace described, they were supportive of whatever she pursued so long as she became successful and could take care of herself.

Although Grace's experiences will be discussed in more depth in future chapters, it was worth noting that she has persisted in college despite working 30 hours a week, being a commuter student, experiencing two deaths in her family, struggling as a first-generation student, and currently dealing with her father's severe illness. On her survey, Grace described

her family's influence on her life, "I want to do well and work as hard as I can to honor those in my family, and also in general want to strive for a better life. My aunts/family also always told me I could do it."

Table 25
Grace's Worlds

Worlds
Family (including aunts and grandma)
Neighborhood
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)

Jasmine. Jasmine was a second-generation Cambodian American, 3rd year student at Redwood University. Following in the path of two of her aunts who earned their bachelor's degrees, pursued their graduate degrees, and were currently both teachers, Jasmine was the first in her generation to attend college. None of her older cousins or her older sister decided to pursue higher education, and her parents used examples of their economic struggle as encouragement for Jasmine to earn her college degree. She, herself, feared job instability after seeing how hard her parents and sister had to work for minimal pay. When asked how she decided to attend a university, Jasmine responded:

> My dad always told me when I was younger, "Where do you want to go for school?" And I said, "Oh, I want to go to college." And he said, "No, you don't want to go to college. You want to go to university." … And when I was younger, because my aunt went to UCLA, I always wanted to go to UCLA. But then as I got older, I was like, "UCLA is very competitive." And there are a lot of smart people that go there. I didn't even apply for UCLA. I didn't apply because I didn't want to get rejected.

Fear of rejection and fear of failure were common themes that ran throughout Jasmine's interview. Part of this fear also appeared to stem from not wanting to disappoint her parents because of how supportive they were of her and how hard they worked to provide for the family. Jasmine's mom ran a donut shop and worked 15-16 hour days; her dad helped her

mom at the donut shop from 4am-7am every morning before heading to his own job as a construction worker. For this reason, Jasmine went home every Saturday to relieve her mom of work so she could shop for store supplies, make doctor's appointments, or take a break. Distance was an important factor for Jasmine when she decided to attend Redwood University.

Although Jasmine grew up near a very large population of Cambodian Americans, she had very few Khmer friends in school. To ensure that Jasmine attended well-funded schools with good resources, they opted out of enrolling her in schools with her cousins that were more geographically convenient. They decided against enrolling her in a reputable high school that was located in a predominantly Cambodian community. Her schools had few other Khmer people due to location, which was a conscious decision by her parents. She described her parents' opinion as:

> It wasn't that they discouraged me from having friends that were Cambodian… So a lot of Cambodians that live on like the East Side, they would go there. And a lot of those Cambodians are gang-related. They have gang-related affiliations with other gangs. So they just didn't want me to be around bad Cambodians, the "bad Cambodians". So I guess it's not just Cambodians. It's like the Cambodians that have a bad name to them.

Jasmine's parents did not dissuade her from having Khmer friends but only wanted their children to "associate with good people." Due to the distance of the schools Jasmine attended, her grandparents and aunts helped coordinate pick-up and drop-off from school, as well as afterschool care, since her parents were working the majority of the day. Jasmine and her siblings learned to be independent from a young age because of their parents' work schedules, and at the same time, she developed a strong sense of empathy for her parents' struggles and stress levels. This was factored into all of her educational decisions.

Upon entering college, Jasmine thought she was going to be a doctor and majored in biological sciences. Right after arriving at Redwood University, she decided to become pharmaceutical sciences major with the aspirations to become a pharmacist. These plans shifted after her first quarter of college, because she struggled in her courses and earned poor grades; she declared her major as undeclared in order to explore her options. A *Southeast Asian Studies* course in the department of anthropology caught her interest, and she declared the major during her third year. This was challenging to share with her parents, because she knew they would be disappointed. Her dad had already declared to the family that his daughter was going to become a pharmacist, so it took some time for Jasmine to work up the courage and inform her parents of the switch. Despite their initial disappointment, her parents reassured her that they were supportive of whatever she decided. Currently, Jasmine aspired to earn her master's and become a teacher, like her aunts. She began volunteering in her aunt's classroom, helping her grade assignments, as well as speaking to different classroom teachers to learn about their experiences.

Table 26
Jasmine's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
Housemates in college
Clubs/organizations
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
College

Natalie. Natalie was a second-generation Cambodian American, 2nd year student at Redwood University. She was in the process of switching out of her biological sciences major into public health sciences because she failed a course that prevented her from moving

on in a three-part series and would leave her too far behind in her major. This was challenging for Natalie and she was really disappointed in herself, because she came to Redwood as a path to becoming a pediatrician. As an added layer, Natalie had not yet told her parents of this switch because she feared disappointing them. Their aspirations were also for Natalie to become a doctor, so Natalie tried hard to fulfill their expectations. On her survey, she shared, "My dad works hard to support me, my sister, and my mom is my motivation to be successful." It was unclear whether Natalie adopted her parents' aspirations of becoming a pediatrician because she was unsure of what other careers were available or of interest to her, and because she wrote in her survey that the highest degree she wanted to earn was her master's in order to become a pediatrician. This was a critical time for Natalie to learn about the options that were available to her academically and career-wise. She needed to expand her knowledge beyond the traditional careers of teaching and becoming a doctor.

Natalie was the first in her family to attend college, even among her extended family. In fact, she found her extended family very discouraging of her pursuit for higher education, some even advising her that it will be ok if she decides not to finish college. Rather than feeling resentful, Natalie used this as a source of motivation to complete college and prove them wrong. With little family knowledge about higher education, Natalie and her best friend spent every lunch period in the career center talking to the career counselor. It was because of the career counselor that Natalie learned about research universities and the application process. She and her best friend applied to all of the research universities in California that they were interested in with the counselor's assistance.

Natalie's family moved down to southern California before her senior year of high school due to her father's job, but Natalie did not want to transfer high schools. She lived

with her best friend's family during senior year and graduated as salutatorian. When deciding between universities, Natalie's mother had a strong influence on her decision, because she wanted her daughter nearby after a year of separation. This, and her mother's illness forced Natalie to feel obligated to choose the local Redwood University rather than her dream university, which was only an hour away. When asked how she felt about that, Natalie said, "I mean um, it took me a while to get used to it, because I really wanted to go to UCLA." Although her parents wanted her to live at home, Natalie convinced her parents to let her live on campus because she needed the quiet study spaces.

Table 27
Natalie's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
Clubs/organizations
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
College
Academic support programs
Music

Nathan. Nathan was a second-generation Chinese/Cambodian American, 3rd year student at Redwood University. Although Nathan learned in high school that he needed a college degree to earn a well-paying job, he was also inspired to attend college from his brother's stories about the college experience. Nathan's brother was three years older than him and attended Coral Tree University while Nathan was going through the college application process. From his brother's stories, he knew he needed to try the "college experience" as well and chose to attend Redwood University. Attending college was also expected of him by his parents and his extended family; all of his older cousins attended college and had careers. Nathan's parents also did all that they could to ensure that their

children were set up to attend college. At the advice of his older brother's elementary school teacher, his parents moved the family to another city in order to enroll in a better school district. Due to this, Nathan grew up in a privileged, white community with very few Asian American students. He described how he was confused growing up, because he began noticing differences between his Cambodian family and his white friends:

> I didn't really realize what I did was different from the other American families. And then I learned that when I went into their house and learned about their etiquette. Like "Oh, it's okay to leave your shoes on." (laughs) So it's like, oh, that was very, very interesting and like mind opening. And so I learned more and more, like as I grew up...and at the time, I still associated myself as just being in the mainstream American culture. I didn't really associate or feel too proudly to be Cambodian...

After this realization, Nathan entered Redwood University determined to join the Cambodian Club and connect with his Cambodian identity.

When applying to colleges, Nathan was deciding between becoming an engineering major and entering pre-med as a biological sciences major. He decided he wanted to help people, so he chose to enter as biological sciences. Immediately, Nathan learned that this was not the right major and not the right path for him. He struggled during his first year of college, admittedly due to his own fault. The transition into independence meant Nathan chose to put his social life over his academic life, and his grades suffered. In addition to this, he was pursuing a major and career path that he learned was not truly what he wanted for himself. Nathan's second year was "one of the hardest times of [his] life," and he had to decide a new path for his academics and his career. These details will be discussed in future chapters, but after months of struggle, Nathan now aspired to earn his bachelor's in business economics and become a financial analyst.

Table 28
Nathan's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
Neighborhood
Clubs/organizations
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
College
Academic support programs
Dancing

Hmong American.

Alex. Alex was a second-generation Hmong American, 5th year student at Redwood University. His educational aspirations were primarily motivated by his desire to raise his own family one day. Alex's parents' divorce led to a very traumatizing childhood, where he was moved to 18-19 different schools in various states by the time Alex reached high school. Each of these locations were low-income areas with a Hmong community. Unfortunately, his parents' divorce also meant Alex was stigmatized and bullied by other Hmong children. Childhood was a very rough period for Alex, and he did not have good experiences in school. Alex felt that many of his teachers held negative perceptions of him as a male, Hmong student. He shared:

> I always felt like because I was the guy, I was the trouble-maker. I don't know why. I felt like a lot of teachers…were pretty judgmental. Because a lot of the Hmong, I'd say like, at least a lot more guys would get into trouble than girls would, at least within a low-income area. I felt like that was pretty degrading. And because I didn't have very good relationships— that's why I didn't talk about my elementary school or middle school very much—because I didn't like the teachers. I always felt like if I asked for help, they weren't very willing.

It appeared that his teachers had ascribed to the "deviant minority myth" about Southeast Asian American students. It was not until Alex's family settled in central California and he

was able to attend middle and high schools in an upper-middle class neighborhood that Alex started liking school. These schools had a lot of resources and Alex thought the teachers were more caring.

The opportunities at his high school and the friends he made during this time period changed his educational trajectory. His best friend's father, who was an attorney, was the first person to speak to Alex about college and the importance of going to a good school. Up until his junior year, Alex did not know about college. His parents did not expect him to go to college, because it was not a reality they knew. He said:

> [The attorney] kinda was under the assumption everyone knows what college is…But I didn't know what college was, so he didn't tell me what it was until I was a junior in high school. But he told me about the career paths, he told me about why it's good to pursue education, why it's good to do well in school. So he was the person that motivated me. Otherwise I would've never gone to college. Like I would've never seen myself go to college.

All of his school friends came from upper-middle class families, and Alex aspired to have lives like theirs. He asked each of his friends' parents about their pathways to success and became determined to follow the same path to secure his own stable future.

The first time Alex learned about research institutions was from his older brother, who decided to attend a research institution three hours away from the family. Their parents were very unsupportive of this decision to move away, which led to his brothers' estrangement from the family for three years. This experience scared Alex into wanting to stay local for college, but his brother returned during his senior year of high school to encourage him to attend a research institution due to the prestige. In addition to this, Alex was part of the AVID and Upward Bound programs that brought in student panels from various institutions and took students on campus tours. They also encouraged students to aim for prestigious research institutions and experience life away from home. Due to these

opportunities and encouragements, Alex decided to attend Redwood University because he knew it had the reputation of being a prestigious university and he had very strong desires to live in a safe and secure community.

Table 29
Alex's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Housemates in college
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
College
Academic support programs
Research

Molly. Molly was a second-generation Hmong American, 4th year student at Redwood University. She had six brothers and sisters, three of whom graduated with bachelor's degrees and the other three attended community colleges. Her parents expected all of them to attend college, but Molly was the first to leave her home and their community. It took some time for Molly's parents to accept her decision, but she appreciated that they did not restrict her from leaving. She was the first to attend a research university, and liked that it would make her "elite." Molly said, "I'm not going to lie about it. It just makes me feel better that I went to a UC." In addition to this, Molly was eager to leave for Redwood University and distance herself from the Hmong community in her hometown, because she wanted to do more than her peers and explore the possibilities outside of her hometown. Very few Hmong people left their hometown, even for school. Despite her eagerness to leave, Molly intended to come back to her family and her hometown after completing her education.

The AVID program was an essential aspect of Molly's high school career and her college application process. She was involved in AVID since her first year of high school and

was fortunate enough to keep the same AVID counselor throughout her high school tenure. They built a very strong relationship during these four years, and her counselor was instrumental in encouraging her to pursue her own aspirations as well as helping her during the college application process. In addition to her counselor, Molly's AVID teacher had a hands-on role of walking her through the online application, teaching her about FAFSA, as well as providing edits on her personal statement. Molly was well supported in the college application process thanks to the AVID program.

As Molly has matured in college and become more in tune with how her aspirations have developed, she realized that her personal background and community has had an influence on her aspirations. She grew up in an impoverished family and an unsafe community. In her own family, Molly survived through domestic violence, drug abuse, and imprisonment. As mentioned previously, Molly also grew up surrounded by a very large Hmong community that she was eager to distance herself from. Due to these experiences, Molly aspired to earn her juris doctor degree and become a lawyer focusing on race politics. She had always been interested in politics, partially due to the influence of her high school history teacher that was heavily involved in politics during his time at UC Berkeley, and said, "I really feel like politics kind of runs my life. I'm always thinking about the politics behind things and how things happen." In addition to being a political science major, Molly was also minoring in gender and sexuality studies and civic and community engagement. These stemmed out of her involvements in the social justice and gender justice worlds, and Molly believed in grassroots community work. Molly how explained her aspirations bridged all of her interests:

> So I want to be able to do as much as I can, and help as many – as much – as I can. So there's, like, a very weird aspect to that. Because people always get confused when

> they're all like, "Why do you want to be a community organizer? Blah, blah, blah…" Well, I mean at the end of the day I want my work to be focused around the community, but also knowing there's also the idea of survival, and you do need a paying job. You need something to survive.

For this reason, she aspired to be a lawyer that also focused on community organizing, helping to bridge both worlds.

Table 30
Molly's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
Housemates in college
Clubs/organizations
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
College
Sports teams
Music

Vivian. Vivian was a second-generation Hmong American, 4th year student at Redwood University. She was the youngest of 10 children and the first to leave home for college. While many of her older siblings were encouraged to get jobs and help support the family income, Vivian was encouraged to excel in school and have high aspirations. The family learned from older siblings' experiences that jobs that required less education were stressful and low paying. Two of her siblings have bachelor's degrees, two earned their associate's degrees, and one earned a certificate to be a nursing assistant. Vivian's parents encouraged her to become a doctor, to which she decidedly said "no" to but considered nursing to appease her parents. She followed in her sister's footsteps during high school and earned a certificate to become a nursing assistant. However, after arriving at Redwood University and learning about her different options for majors, she chose to pursue Public Health Sciences because of its focus on the community. Vivian explained, "I want to be a

Public Health educator or anything along those lines just so I can kind of advocate for my community." Her academic and career aspirations stemmed from her desire to advance her family and the Hmong community. She planned to return home after college and bring her knowledge back to working with the community.

Vivian's path to college included a lot of sacrifice and family, teacher, and counselor support. Before her senior year of high school, Vivian's parents decided to move the family to Wisconsin to be near her uncle. This was heartbreaking to Vivian because she was in the top ten of her class and wanted to attend a university in California. She shared her situation with her teachers, and they enlisted the help of school counselors. Vivian explained:

> I complained a lot to my school, especially to my teachers before my senior year…because I loved my teachers. So my teachers kind of got hold of my counselors, because "You know, maybe you should talk to this girl," and then they talked to me. And they had a few phone calls to my parents. Of course, my parents didn't speak English so they talked to my brothers. My brothers talked to my parents and my parents were just like, "Okay fine. If she wants to stay, if she doesn't love us, she can go."

Her parents begrudgingly allowed Vivian to live with her older brothers during her senior year of high school, and she graduated salutatorian of her senior class. When deciding where to attend college, privates schools were out of the question due to financial reasons, but Vivian knew she wanted to attend a research university due to their prestige. She also wanted to be the first in her family to attend a UC school. Vivian admitted that the primary reason she chose Redwood University was because her Hmong doctor also attended Redwood University, and he recommended it as a great school that had a Hmong Club. She was drawn in by the idea of having a Hmong Club at school, because it would mean having a sense of familiarity while she was away from home. Vivian and her high school friend arrived at

Redwood University to a failing club, but she worked tirelessly to revive the club and recreate a sense of family for Hmong American students at Redwood.

Table 31
Vivian's Worlds

Worlds
Self
Family
Extended Family
Love-life
Clubs/organizations
Friends (pre-college)
Friends (from college)
Housemates in college
College
Academic support programs
Work place (income source)

Lao American.

Charlie. Charlie was a second-generation Lao American, 2nd year student at Redwood University. He grew up in a low-income, predominantly Latino and Vietnamese community that had very few Lao families. For this reason, Charlie believed his family had to become "very Americanized," despite attending a Lao temple and socializing with other Lao families in the community. He also attributed this to the fact that his mom migrated to the U.S. at elementary school age, learned English, and went on to earn her associate's degree at a community college. Because she was able to earn her degree, Charlie's mother also expected her children to go to college.

Charlie was motivated to attend college from an early age because of his mother's accomplishments and because his older cousins had all attended college as well. He was also determined to be the first in the family to attend a research university, which was highly encouraged by his mom and high school. His mom provided Charlie with everything he

needed to accomplish this goal—paying for all of his Advanced Placement exams, letting him get his license, and buying him a car so he could drive himself to community service events. His high school counselors were an instrumental part of Charlie's college application process. He said, "That's where the counselors stepped in more, reached out their hands," and they helped Charlie with applications, campus visits, and completing scholarship applications. He only applied to and was accepted to the three research universities that his mother approved of, but he regretted not having the confidence to apply to the top-tier universities he was interested in. Despite this, Charlie was very happy with his decision and loves Redwood University.

In middle school, Charlie decided he wanted to become a doctor. This aspiration developed while his father was in the hospital battling liver cancer, a fight he did not win. After his father's passing, Charlie was determined to enter the medical field to help others. This goal came to a crashing halt in his freshman year of college when Charlie learned how expensive, time consuming, and difficult medical school would be. Consumed by the guilt that he was a financial burden on his mother, who was already struggling to finance his undergraduate education, Charlie decided he needed new career aspirations. He needed to find a career that he could start soon after earning his bachelor's degree in order to start helping his mother improve their financial situation. On his survey, Charlie wrote that, "his main purpose for going to college is to acquire a job right after so I can support my mother and my siblings." This was one of the values he had learned from his father, and he was determined to honor it. After searching the internet for career paths available to biology majors, Charlie settled on aiming to become a clinical laboratory scientist, which would only require one more year of training and education after earning his bachelor's. Despite the

initial disappointment of having to give up his original aspirations, Charlie was happy to have the pressure of excelling for medical school lifted so he could finally join different clubs and organizations and enjoy his college experience.

Table 32
Charlie's Worlds

Worlds
Family
Extended family
Housemates in college
Clubs/organizations
Friends (from college)

Chapter Summary

These Southeast Asian American students all had different pathways to the research university, but there were also similarities across their experiences. All of the students developed an awareness of the prestige of the University of California campuses as higher education institutions, and many of their families understood this prestige as well. For most of the students and their parents, there was no doubt that students would attend a university versus a less prestigious state college once they were admitted. Overall, students chose to attend these universities due to ranking, the encouragement of their families, mentors, and/or counselors, and the distance (near or far) from their families. For many students, part of their motivation for attending college was to be able to give back to and support their parents after establishing their careers. Several students also had a desire give back to their neighborhood communities and/or advance their ethnic communities. Additionally, almost all of their parents were supportive of their children's decisions and aspirations, but we also saw that Evelyn's parents had difficulty in understanding her major (feminist studies) and career

aspirations (childbirth educator). Parents also remained supportive of their children through their change of majors, which many students did during their first two years.

Ten of the twenty-four students diverged from their original pathways by switching majors and/or career aspirations. Two of these ten students (Adam and Molly) switched back into their original majors after realizing they were limited in time (Adam) or options for majors (Molly). Sara entered as a sociology major and added a double major in Asian American Studies in her first year; soon after realizing she was not interested in sociology, she switched out of the major into financial math with her boyfriend's encouragement. Several students entered college with the hopes of pursuing a medical or STEM degree, but those who struggled academically had to reassess their goals and choose new majors and career paths. Seven of the ten students diverged from their original STEM paths, five of whom were on the pre-med track. While Charlie and Natalie continued on with new STEM aspirations to major in public health sciences instead of biological sciences (Natalie) and be a clinical laboratory scientist instead of a medical doctor (Charlie), Henry, Isabel, Jasmine, Lily, and Nathan chose to switch into non-STEM majors. Unfortunately, Natalie still had not informed her parents of the change at the time of her interview, because she feared disappointing her parents.

Five of the twenty-four students added a major and/or minor after entering the university, and four of the five students added the major/minor in Asian American Studies. Amelia, Kim, Sara, and Sophia wanted to understand more about Asian American history and experiences in the U.S. For Kim, courses in Asian American Studies also served to balance the ethnocentric views and racial microaggressions that she faced from students in her communication courses. Not only did these departments serve an academic purpose, they

were also culturally validating environments that provided students with culturally relevant knowledge and spaces to explore their identities.

It was also clear in some students' narratives that they remained unaware of the academic options that were available to them at the university or some were unaware of the degree requirements that were necessary for the careers they desired. For example, Beth and Jeff both wanted to become optometrists and thought that they only needed to earn master's degrees in order to do so. Also, Natalie wrote that she aspired to earn her master's and become a pediatrician. Therefore, some students were taking courses and pursuing their majors without understanding the steps that were necessary for their desired career. These students were not receiving the proper counseling they needed to ensure that they could achieve their career aspirations.

Students belonged to multiple worlds, and they had to negotiate their roles and relationships with each of these worlds as they navigated their higher education experiences. As students continued on their educational pathways, they also faced personal and familial hurdles that caused difficulties along their journey (parents' illnesses, death of relatives, clashing cultural views, etc.). Students had to learn how to balance these difficulties with their "college world" and academic life. Despite these challenges, students chose to persist with their university education.

Chapter 6

Supports and Challenges in the Pathways and College Experiences of Southeast Asian American Students

This chapter presents findings to research question two: *Who or what provides support to students, and who or what causes difficulties for students?* This question was guided by the Bridging Multiple Worlds framework (Cooper et al., 2002; Cooper, 2011), which examined supports and challenges for racial and ethnic minority youth in the K-12 pipeline. In their pathways, students encountered *cultural/institutional brokers* who helped them navigate their academic experiences, but they also encountered *cultural/institutional gatekeepers* who acted as barriers to their educational success. In this section, I draw on responses from students' surveys and interviews to present the major themes that arose across the data. In terms of support, I will discuss: 1) high school outreach programs that guided students on their pathway into college, 2) support from family members, 3), support from high school and university mentors, 4) support from peers, 5) support from campus clubs and organizations, and 6) support from campus resource centers. In terms of challenges, I will discuss: 1) the college application process, 2) the role of self, 3) the role of others, 4) academic struggles, 5) financial struggles, and 6) feelings of loneliness, isolation, and marginalization. I end with a discussion about students who had considered leaving the university and how they persisted through these issues. It is important to note that these supports and challenges that I discuss in each section were not the sole sources of support or challenge students faced, but these sources of support and challenge were often interrelated. For example, the feelings of isolation and marginalization sometimes coincided with times of academic struggle, where students felt they had no one to turn to for support. Also, due to the

fact that I explore issues of campus racial climate and culturally validating environments in more depth in the next two chapters, I do not fully elaborate on these topics in this chapter.

Sources of Support

The following people and organizations served as sources of support for Southeast Asian American students at Redwood University and Coral Tree University.

High school outreach programs. Seven of the twenty-four students discussed the role of high school outreach programs as sources of knowledge and support in their pathways to college. The survey and interview questions did not specifically ask about high school outreach programs, but students discussed the role of these programs when responding to interview questions about *the reason they were in college, the reason they selected a research university*, or *who helped them get into college*. Therefore, it is unknown whether more students in this study participated in these programs, but I can conclude that these programs played a more prominent role in these seven students' transition into college. Four students identified the AVID program[8] (Advancement Via Individual Determination), one student was involved in both AVID and the Upward Bound[9] program, one student identified the Summer Bridge Program offered through Redwood University, one student participated in UC Berkeley's Southeast Asian Student Coalition's "Summer Institute" (SI)[10], and one student participated in UCLA's United Khmer Students' "Khmer Outreach Retention, Education" (KORE) program[11]. Both SI and KORE are student-initiated outreach and retention programs started by the ethnic student organizations at their respective universities, illustrating the value of student-initiated programs and why they need more institutional

[8] http://www.avid.org/default.aspx
[9] http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html
[10] https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~sasc/
[11] http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/uks/KORE.html

support. The value of student-initiated programs in students' college experiences will also be discussed throughout later chapters.

Although each of these programs are unique, they all served to help students reach and transition into higher education. High school outreach programs such as AVID and Upward Bound provided students with tutoring, access to academic counselors, provided college information session, took students on college tours, guided them through the application process, helped them complete their FAFSAs, and counseled students who were struggling to choose between universities. AVID (a global nonprofit organization) and Upward Bound (a federally funded TRIO program) are institutionalized components with paid staff members. On the other hand, SI and KORE are student-initiated outreach and retention programs that operate with some institutional funding but mainly supported through student fundraising efforts; these programs are run and staffed by undergraduate students. SI provides Southeast Asian American high school students with five days on the UC Berkeley campus for students to experience college life and learn about Southeast Asian American culture and history. KORE is a year-long mentorship program that pairs UCLA students with Khmer high school students, but they also provide college tours and field trips for students to explore their academic and career interests.

Students who had access to high school outreach programs received numerous benefits that lasted through their college years. Lily shared how her KORE mentor has become a lifelong mentor:

> I literally turn to her for everything. I still remember the first day of school [at Coral Tree University], I didn't know what to sign up for. I was like, "What am I supposed to take?" And I just called her, and she's always there to help me. And then she would always text me and say, "Oh, you know, I know you're out of KORE and everything; I know you're like an older girl now, but you can always come and talk to me." Because she's from Long Beach too, and she went to UCLA—she's in USC

> right now. She's so successful. She's doing urban planning. I really, really look up to her. She helped me with – when I decided to change my major, too. She sat down and sketched out all of the possible majors and like, "When am I going to complete it? How hard is it? What is it about?" And she was just giving me a lot of advice. I see her a lot. If I go back home, and it's like a long break, I will go and see her. It's a really good organization.

The unique aspect of student-initiated outreach and retention programs is that they are staffed by undergraduate students, so the mentors that students gained were similar in age. The counselor relationships that students developed through the AVID and Upward Bound programs appeared to have ended when students graduated from high school and transitioned into college. We see in Lily's example that her relationship with her KORE mentor continues to this present day. These relationships straddle the line between professional and personal, since these mentoring relationships can also develop into real friendships.

Family. Family members were critical sources of support for students in high school, during the college application process, as financial providers, and as sources of inspiration and motivation during college. All of the students discussed how their parents and family members provided support for their college education in one way or another. Chloe and Beth discussed how their parents had the financial means and invested heavily in educational resources that would get them into college. Chloe participated in several extracurricular activities, and Beth's parents paid for academic tutors for her and her brothers throughout their education. Molly and Nathan had siblings who were already in college and helped them through college and FAFSA applications. Jasmine, Grace, and Tom had aunts who paved the direction for college and provided emotional support through their own process. Alex's older brother's girlfriend (now wife) provided the financial support he needed for exams and college applications, because his own family could not afford to help him. Alex shared:

> [My brother's] girlfriend would use her money to support my family even though they're not married. So that's why I included her, because without her, we would not have a place to live—which is really amazing. I'm so fortunate. Yea, I mean she is amazing. It's like, "Man…I want a girl like that", and then yea, now I did. Now I found a girl like that.

These are only some of the examples of how family members supported students through their actions. Mostly importantly, all of the students shared their gratitude for their parents and family's efforts, support, and acceptance of their aspirations.

High school and university mentors. Mentors provided students with knowledge, resources, opportunities, counseling, and emotional support. Four students named high school teachers, counselors and a tennis coach who served as important mentors in their pathways to college, and one student named community members who helped him see the possibilities of attending college. Amelia and Molly relied on their high school counselors and teachers to help them learn about college and what the experience would be like, since they did not have family members who shared in the process. Amelia's eighth grade history teacher remained a mentor throughout high school, and some of this influence was seen in the fact that Amelia enrolled at Redwood University as a history major. They continued to remain in touch while Amelia was in college. Kim's high school tennis coach became a valuable mentor in making college decisions and planning for her future. She shared:

> The pressure to kind of realize that college is what I make of it and I should want to attend a college to grow as a person and learn a lot about myself and not only just about school and different majors and subjects…he's a mentor but also my tennis coach as well…He was just a really good friend and really pushed me. He went to the same church, and so we were in the same youth group. He played tennis and he was in AVID. People always compared us together. He was always very adamant that I should go to college if that's what I want, with the realization that college would be something that would be really good for me. He was good about making sure that my decisions are my decisions and to also understand the benefits and costs of college and benefit and costs of anything I do after high school.

Through her mentor, Kim learned that college was not just about academics and preparing for a career, but it was also about personal growth and exploration. Many of these students also made a point to remain in touch with their mentors, as part of staying connected to their communities.

Students also found mentors through various campus spaces— through their academic courses, the campus outreach and retention center, the campus cultural center, and library archives. Not only were these mentors important sources of support for students, they served as cultural brokers who helped students navigate higher education as well as helping them plan their lives after college. Alex considered his mentor the most supportive person he had during college, because he felt lost and had minimal support until he met his professor at the end of his junior year. This professor invited Alex to join his research lab, which inspired Alex to change his educational and career trajectory. His "PI," as Alex referred to him, became an important source of academic and emotional support. He encouraged Alex to start raising his grade point average in consideration for graduate school, something Alex had never considered. With his PI's encouragement and support, Alex found a job based in his hometown and was accepted into a master's program that would be funded by his new employers. These mentors helped students understand the possibilities that resulted from their degree, and they helped students understand the steps that were necessary to help them reach these goals.

Peers. Peers were an essential aspect of students' transition into college and during their college experience. They provided each other with academic support, social support, and emotional support. Nine of the students also named a boyfriend or girlfriend who served as important sources of support. Since the topic of student peers will be discussed at length

throughout the next few chapters, I will end this section with Jack's words about his "bigs" from his ex-fraternity:

> All my bigs are Cambodian. They chose me because I'm Cambodian. I was the first one that came in in two years. I have one big bro that's Cambodian and three big sisters—they're all Cambodian. They all graduated. It's definitely them that's always been there, who have always been supportive.

Jack's mentors, or "bigs," understood the importance of supporting fellow Khmer students at Coral Tree University so they all took him under his wing. They all reached out to him to be their "little brother," and Jack struggled when they all graduated. However, them leaving Coral Tree University also taught him about the value of having mentors during college, so Jack made a point to offer his mentorship to younger students whenever possible. This was a theme that can be seen among students at both universities and will be illustrated throughout the next several chapters—students learned the value of having mentors during their college experience, so they make a point to offer their own forms of mentorship to fellow students through their involvement in clubs and organizations or their outreach programs.

Organizations. All but three students were involved in a campus club or organization, and twenty were involved with an ethnic club or organization. These organizations include: Asian American student political organizations, Southeast Asian Club, Vietnamese Club, Hmong Club, Cambodian Club, Queer Asian American and Pacific Islander Club, fraternities (pre-med; Asian-interest), sororities (Panhellenic; Latina-interest), leadership club, pre-optometry club, a Polynesian dance club, dance groups, and sports teams. Students had a range of interests, but the majority were heavily invested in their ethnic clubs and organizations. Of course, this may also be attributed to the snowball sampling technique and students who advertised the research flyer through their clubs and organizations. These organizations allowed students to explore and express their different

identities, find academic, social, and emotional support, and contributed to students' sense of belonging at their universities. Natalie shared how joining the executive board of her leadership club helped her start liking her university more. She said:

> Coming here, I kind of had that expectation to have, like, my college friends. Um and besides like my roommate, and um ... the few couple that I'm close with. I haven't really met like a set group, I guess. But this was last year, when I didn't really feel it. But this year, being on board with [the leadership club], I'm starting to feel it. I'm, starting to like [Redwood University] more.

Organizations offered the opportunity to form friendships with people who have similar interests, which was something many students said they were looking for. Evelyn tried to revive the Hmong Club at Coral Tree University, but the club quickly dissolved when the president of the club left the university and membership numbers were too small to sustain itself. Although this was a major disappointment for Evelyn, she searched for other outlets that would serve as her community. Evelyn joined a Latina-interest sorority with the encouragement of her friend, and she was a member of the Polynesian dance club. This was her "stress reliever." These spaces became Evelyn's community at Coral Tree University, and her friends in these organizations were "like family."

Campus resource centers. Campus resource centers served as important spaces for academic support, but students also received emotional support from the students and staff members at these centers. The campus resource centers that students utilized included the student outreach and retention center at Redwood University, tutoring centers at both universities, the cultural centers at both universities, and the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). One of the most frequently cited spaces by students at Redwood University was the student outreach and retention center and the Director, Dr. D. Not only did this campus resource center provide study and meeting spaces, free exam booklets, and free food,

it also offered students the opportunity to develop their own outreach and retention project. This center supported and provided the space for a Southeast Asian American retention seminar for freshmen and transfer students started by Ethan, and Nathan served as one of the peer mentors for the seminar. Aside from the services that these campus resource centers provided, staff members served as important mentors to several students. Ethan, Chloe, and Molly all credited Dr. D as an "amazing" director, and Molly also developed a mentoring relationship with the program coordinator at the Redwood University cultural center. Evelyn felt comfortable seeking help from her EOP counselors for academic, financial, and even personal advice. She said, "They always ask me how I am academically: 'Why are you doing this?' 'If you need help you need to go to CLAS, or take a workshop,' or 'You need to de-stress,' like stop doing so many things." Evelyn checked in with her counselors at least once or twice a quarter and said they call focused on different aspects—one counselor will focus on academic goals, she can talk financial advice with a different counselor, and another counselor will discuss the large vision and goals for her life. The EOP program supported Evelyn in several aspects of her life.

Sources of Challenge

The following people, organizations, and experiences served as sources of challenge for Southeast Asian American students at Redwood University and Coral Three University.

The college application process. Students who were not involved in high school outreach program or did not have older siblings or family members who could help them through the application process admitted that they would have liked more guidance in their application process. Chloe explained why she became very proactive in searching for mentors and resources when she arrived at Redwood University:

> I wish I was given more resources, getting into college…from my high school, and also from—I didn't know a lot of people that were already in college that could help me. I think a lot of my cousins that were able to—I never felt like I was okay to approach. I was not able to have somebody who I could approach in college that I can ask a bunch of questions to. So that's why maybe when I came to college and I got involved, I was searching for these mentors, really actively looking for people that can really help me. So, thankfully I found those people in the beginning of my college career that kind of helped me kind of figure out the college system, even if I couldn't have that support back in high school.

Chloe needed but did not have access to cultural brokers that could guide her through the college application process, which served to build her agency once she arrived at Redwood University. Chloe also made friends, like Ethan, who encouraged her to become highly involved in campus activities to build her networks and support her community. Isabel experienced a similar situation as Chloe, because she felt that her high school introduced her to the materials that she needed to complete, but they did not provide actual help with completing the applications. She admitted to feeling "flustered by the amount of information that there was about school" and so she "had to take a lot of guesses" on her application materials. Despite these challenges, Chloe and Isabel were able to successfully complete their application materials and be accepted into Redwood University.

The role of self. Some students accepted full responsibility for the challenges they faced during college. Amelia, Anna, Chloe, and Jasmine felt that they were responsible for creating their mental roadblocks. They each admitted to placing extremely high expectations on themselves, which often lead to a fear of failure or a fear of disappointing others. In addition to this, Amelia and Chloe were highly involved on campus, often struggling to balance their commitments with their academics. As discussed in her profile, Chloe admitted that she was hesitant to participate in the study since she felt that she, herself, was struggling

to be retained. She acknowledged that she was slowly learning about the importance of self-care and trying to adopt this concept into her lifestyle.

The role of others. While family and community members have mostly served as sources of support for students, they have also caused some challenges. These experiences caused emotional difficulties, which led to academic challenges for some students. Adam, Henry, Sophia, and Tom had strained relationships with a parent or both parents. This did not mean that relationships were bad or estranged, but that communication or displays of love or affection were sometimes lacking or dissatisfactory in their relationship. Henry, though close and communicative with his family, struggled for them to understand his queer identity and progressive views. He said:

> So my family expects me to follow the normative traditions of—I'm the guy, so I'm supposed to marry a girl, she's supposed to be submissive. I'm supposed to be masculine. She's the stay-at-home wife, she cooks, and I'm supposed to be the breadwinner.

Henry considered his family very Vietnamese, very Catholic, and very conservative, so many of their conversations about their values and ideals ended in stalemates. However, Henry has not given up on helping his mom understand his identity:

> It's been a struggle, and I was just like, okay, I need to help her understand. Because to her, trans and gay are the same thing and that was problematic in a lot of ways just because it amounted to my mom being, "Okay how much do I need to save up," and I'm like ,"What?" "Oh you know for your surgery." And I was all, "No, no, no that's not how it works." To explain that to her—it took her a long time before she understood that this whole concept of being a girl stuck in a male body is different from being gay.

While the process has been emotionally challenging for Henry, he refused to give up on his family and was unafraid to argue about their differing views on social justice.

After her first year in the dorms, Anna chose to leave the Redwood University area and move to a city that was an hour north to be with her boyfriend and the Hmong community. She shared:

> I just wanted to move there because I know people there. I have friends and family there. It makes me feel more at home. Every now and then at the dorms, I would get homesick. And, being here – I was away from everybody – my boyfriend. I have some friends here, but for some reason I was really anti-social. Everything just wasn't "me". So, I really felt distant. So, I felt being in Lompoc makes me feel more at home, I guess.

However, this did not come without complications. Anna broke Hmong cultural norms when she decided to move in with her boyfriend, and the Hmong community was critical of her actions. Anna shared how the community reacted:

> [The criticisms] kind of affected me in a way. I moved in with him right after my first year, and when everybody started noticing I was around town, they were like, "Does this girl live in town now?" So, word just got out. They were critical. It's not my boyfriend who moved out of town, it's me who moved out of town to live with him. So, as a female, you get a more disgusting name. So, they were criticizing me choosing this path for me and my boyfriend…It really annoyed me, but I didn't come here to be with him, or them; I came here for school…But, my boyfriend's uncle spoke up about it, "She may be living here. She may be living with her boyfriend, but don't criticize her. She's a good girl, and you shouldn't judge what you don't know." So, that decreased the amount of people opposing it.

The criticisms lasted for a long period of time before her boyfriend's uncle defended her to the community. Anna admitted that the uncomfortable situation took a toll on her emotionally because she was defensive about her situation, but Anna did not think it affected her academics.

Alex and Vivian, a couple who met at Redwood University, experienced two sets of challenges related to their relationship that affected them both emotionally and academically. When Vivian left her community, she realized her ex-boyfriend was one of the aspects of the community that she wanted to leave behind. This break up was difficult for her ex-boyfriend

to handle for a long period of time, and so he made life challenging for Vivian and Alex, who had become her new boyfriend. Related to this, her family was very against their new relationship because Vivian and Alex shared the same last name. Though there was no relation between them, it was taboo in Hmong culture to be with someone who had the same last name because you were believed to have descended from the same clan. Vivian explained:

> They're not supportive of it because it's going against the culture. So they're like, "Okay, if you're gonna go against the culture, you're going against the family. So we're not gonna support you anymore." And that's why it's really, really hard on me um, because like my family would contact me and they gave me hard time.

Her family disowned her temporarily and cut off all financial support, which she had used to help cover rent. Although they still struggled with the idea, her family had eventually learned to accept that this was a serious relationship she planned to stay in. During this same time period, Vivian had numerous responsibilities as president of the Hmong Club, and she was having roommate issues. The emotional struggle affected Vivian's academics, to the point where she was placed on academic probation for two quarters, which in turn caused Alex to feel anguish and struggle with his own academics. Although Vivian admitted that this was an extremely stressful period in her life, she was thankful that it taught her about her own persistence and how much she able to withstand as a person.

These stories are important examples of the multiple worlds and identities that students are also part of in addition to college. Students were constantly negotiating their own beliefs and values with their families and their communities, while also navigating their expectations in college. Henry, Anna, Alex, and Vivian could have benefitted from the help of cultural and institutional brokers to help them navigate through these challenges, and their

examples showcase the need for culturally responsive counselors who understand diverse students' experiences.

Academic struggles. Many students also encountered academic challenges that were a salient aspect of their college experience. Eleven of the twenty-four students had been placed on academic probation for at least one or more quarters. However, four of these eleven students had also earned spots in the dean's honor list for at least one or more quarters. Five students discussed how they struggled with their STEM courses and were eventually forced or chose to switch out to non-STEM majors. Others persisted as STEM majors but admitted that they continued to struggle. Several students discussed how they struggled to balance their extracurricular commitments with their academics. One student , Evelynn, struggled with test taking and multiple-choice exams during her first quarter of college and ended up on academic probation. Evelyn was proactive in seeking help from counselors and enrolled in multiple workshops to help her through these issues, but she resigned herself to understanding that these exam grades were not an indication of how much and what she had learned in the courses. Evelyn shared:

> This quarter, I'm more focusing on what I get out of my classes as opposed to my grades. And I know that grades are important when it comes to grad school stuff, so I feel like in a way that kind of holds me back because I know I don't have the highest GPA, but I feel like I really just wanna learn.

Although Evelyn understood the importance of having a good grade point average for graduate school, she placed more value on the knowledge she was gaining in her last quarter of college rather than worrying about the grades she would earn.

Students like Alex and Grace shared how they felt underprepared and lost during their first year of college. Alex said:

> When I was a freshman, I was so unprepared on what to expect for college. I didn't have a strict enough study plan, or I didn't have very poor study ethics. And yea I was…it just was chaos. I didn't have my priorities straight, and yea. In that sense, I was struggling mentally because that reflected clearly on my academics at the time as well…I did not associate myself with a lot of people in classes. It brought a lot of self-esteem issues with me as well. It's like, "Man I don't even belong here, 'cause I'm not even as smart as these people." It's like, "Why am I in [Redwood University] if I can't even compete with these people?"

He felt that his educational background was insufficient compared to other students, because he had never taken physics or engineering courses in high school. Alex internalized the academic struggles he was facing as an individual problem and questioned his belonging in the major and the university. Once Alex started interacting with other students, he realized that he was not the only one struggling in his courses and his grade point average was similar to several other students. This realization and meeting his PI, as discussed in prior sections, boosted Alex's morale about persisting as an engineering major. Grace was in a similar situation as Alex during her freshman year. She shared:

> I mean, honestly, I didn't do well my first years of college. I didn't even know like, I didn't even understand like how to study or what to do. And I didn't understand the expectations. And I didn't really have anybody to guide me, of how to get classes or whatever. I personally had to go to the counselor's office and actually ask around.

Grace was also in a unique position compared to other students in this study because she was a commuter student who was only on campus for classes. Her interactions with other students at Redwood University mainly took place in the classroom, and she had limited access to the social networks that other students had living on campus. For this reason, Grace knew she needed to advocate for herself and was proactive in seeking the professional help she needed. Grace struggled for her first two years but eventually learned what she needed to do to be successful. She explained, "But then I started catching on and then started understanding how to take the test and how to do things. Then I met friends, and we all started to study together

and started to understand." Even though she was a commuter student, Grace learned that she also needed to make friends in her courses to succeed.

As a transfer student, Adam struggled to adjust to the differences between the university system and the community college system. Adam chose not to seek academic help from his professors or teaching assistants, because he feared imposing on the professor's time and felt that he never received direct answers to his questions in past attempts. At the end of his first year at Coral Tree University, Adam was sent an Academic Disqualification letter which gave him until the fall to raise his grade point average. Adam turned to a high school friend who had attended Coral Tree University since her freshman year. He shared:

> She knows a lot of stuff about here. She started here from freshman here. I guess she knew a lot of stuff I didn't know. Adjusting from community college life and here to me is different. There's something with the grade point average, something with the units. You need to make this amount of units in this quarter. I didn't understand it…I assumed it was the same thing as community college. Just take your classes. Just a checkmark thing. Here are the courses you need to take. Just checkmark, and then you'll graduate. That's what I thought.

His friend reassured him that he would be fine and advised him to see an academic counselor. It would be the first time Adam saw an academic counselor since arriving at Coral Tree University, because he did not understand that things would be different in the university. With the counselor's help, Adam scheduled five courses for the summer that would keep him on track to graduate within two years; he passed all five classes with A's and B's. Transfer students, like Adam, are in strong need of institutional brokers to help them understand the university system, especially if they have been socialized into a different college system for several years.

Financial struggles. Several students experienced financial hardship during college, some more extreme than others. Many students were getting by with financial aid and the

help of family, but Charlie, Henry, Molly, and Grace all discussed how the cost of college was one of their biggest challenges during college. Charlie and Henry felt guilty for being a financial burden since their parents were funding their college education. Charlie seriously considered whether he had to drop out of school after his first year of college because he was concerned about his mother's financial situation. Not only was his mother also funding his older sister's education, she had opened a restaurant in Colorado that was struggling. When Charlie went home for the summer, he had a serious conversation with his mother about whether he should drop out of Redwood University. She reassured him that she did not want her children to drop out of college, because all of her efforts were meant to support them. Charlie admitted that the stress of this period took a toll on his academics. Similar to Charlie, Henry considered dropping out of Redwood University because he did not know how he was going to cover all of his financial costs with the $300 that his father allotted to him for school parking and school supplies. Since his aspirations for a career in public relations did not require a bachelor's degree, Henry thought it would be practical to leave Redwood University without a degree. He raised this idea with his parents, who adamantly refused to let him leave college. To compromise, Henry dropped his second major in public health sciences because the textbooks were too expensive. His parents disliked this decision because the degree would have earned him a bachelor's of science (B.S.) degree, but Henry pacified his parents by adding a social policy/public service major. Interestingly, it was students whose college education was being funded by their parents that felt the weight of their burden and seriously considered leaving college in order to ease this burden. Since both of their parents were adamant that they not leave college, it was unclear whether Charlie and

Henry would have decided to drop out if their parents were not so vocal about the issue. In addition to this, neither of them discussed alternative options for funding their education.

Unlike Charlie and Henry, Molly and Grace relied on financial aid and work to cover their educational costs. Molly's financial aid covered her tuition, but she used student loans to cover her housing, food, and living expenses. On top of this, Molly worked at least 30 hours a week between her campus position and babysitting. Her family gave her small amounts of cash here and there, but she did not rely on them as a source of financial support. Due to her work schedule, Molly felt forced to negotiate her work and academic commitments. She explained having to choose between one and the other in her schedule:

> I feel like I have to really think about—there have been times when I'd be like, "Oh, I'm going to skip class because I'm gonna work, because I need to work." There have been times when I skip work because I need to do academics, and so then like it's a balance. And it's just been interesting kind of seeing that. Lately I've been getting a lot of questions about, like, how do I balance so much on my plate. And I feel like my answer to a lot of that is understanding where your priorities lie and what you need to do in order to make sure that you stay secure. And then, for me, like I said, I skip work to do homework, I skip class to do work.

Other students sought Molly's advice on balance because she was also highly involved in student and community organizations. As we see from her quote, in order to do it all, Molly had to make sacrifices in each of her commitments in order to maintain balance.

Grace struggled to balance her academic and family commitments with her 25-30 hours per week workload. She came from a very low-income family and had been working since high school to support herself. Grace explained:

> Some of them, they don't understand that I, honestly, don't have anything. I, literally, have no extra money to buy certain things. My parents don't pay for my gas. My parents don't pay for my insurance. Like I pay for that, and I kind of feel like I am struggling in college, like money wise. I think everybody struggles, but like I struggle with just being—just trying to graduate, too. Going through all my daily troubles in life, and with actually working, too, and I don't feel like people know that some students have to work to graduate. Some students have to work to survive.

Work was such a financial necessity that she struggled to take time off work when her grandmother and her little cousin passed away during her first year of college. Grace wanted to be available to her family, but she feared not making enough to survive. Not only was Grace struggling with the loss of her family members during her freshman year, she also felt lost during her first year of college trying to navigate the university system alone. Throughout her four years of college, Grace struggled to balance her academics and her familial commitments with 25-30 hours of work per week. She said, "I mean I think, honestly, if I didn't work so much— 'cause right now I work like 25 hours or 30 hours a week— I would do better." Aside from making social sacrifices on campus, Grace also faced criticism from her mother for neglecting cultural and community events because of work. Her mother feared that Grace would lose her Khmer roots and traditions because she was never present at social gatherings. With all of these experiences, Grace identified herself as a low-income, first-generation, racially diverse commuter student, and she had trouble finding people who understood her identity at Redwood University. She said:

> There's always that disconnect where people don't understand of like being in America—not having a lot of money, being in that lower class, and plus, your race. That whole thing is not understood by a lot of people that come here, at all. I don't think so, because I just have met many people that didn't understand why I had to work, why I didn't have so much fun like they did, or have free time, and why I always tried to get my homework done on certain days. People just didn't understand my life, or where I was coming from.

Her commuter student status and work hours also made it difficult for her to have time to connect with other students outside of her courses. Although Grace was invited to join the Southeast Asian Club by Ethan and she was interested in being part of the club, her work hours prevented her from participating in club activities. Despite these challenges, Grace

persisted because she was determined to succeed and take advantage of the opportunities that other youth in her community did not have.

Battling feelings of loneliness, isolation, and marginalization. For at least half of the students, the first quarter, the first year, or the first two years of college produced feelings of loneliness, isolation, and marginalization. While other students may have also felt these emotions as well, these experiences were more salient to the students who discussed these issues in their interview. Some students were homesick, many had trouble developing real connections with other students, some struggled to develop friendships as commuter students, and some had to learn how to come to terms with not being present for their community during tragic events. I also discuss a subtheme of how students' identities as people of color contributed to their feelings of marginalization. In this section, I share the examples of Molly, Anna, Adam, Ethan, Jeff, and Kim and explain how they persisted through these challenges.

Molly experienced an extreme case of homesickness and doubt about choosing to attend Redwood University, which was especially surprising because she was so eager to leave her home community behind. Several things contributed to her feelings of isolation—Molly was surprised that her grades were lower than expected, so she felt inadequate about being at Redwood University, she was homesick, she had yet to build solid friendships, her roommate went home nearly every weekend, and she knew no other students from her high school. Molly felt as though she had no support. On top of this, her siblings criticized her for being different when she returned home after her first quarter. She explained:

> My siblings were very vocal about, like, "Oh, you've changed. You're just like a different person now,"…And I remember a specific term that they used—you're too "[OC]" for us now. Yea, it was kind of like— you think you've left and you're better than us now…

Molly was very hurt by her siblings' perceptions and accusations about how she had changed, especially because she had been struggling all quarter. Molly decided to "stick it out" and return to Redwood University for the winter quarter, and she never told anyone that she wanted to leave. Luckily, Molly became friends with a few other Hmong students and learned that they felt similarly to her. Her friends shared that they had also considered leaving and returning home to the Central Valley. Molly learned that feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and isolation were common, so she decided to do something about this problem. She said, "I guess just through them, and talking to them, really helped me understand that I wanna stay here, and I want to start an organization—a community, here. So that was really helpful." With this realization, Molly and Vivian worked to revive the Hmong Club at Redwood University and build a community for themselves.

For Anna, her commuter student status led her to feel isolated from the student community and limited the number of friendships she was able to build. She and her boyfriend carpooled into the city, so she coordinated her schedule with his work schedule. Anna shared:

> The friends I made from last year are all here and asking me to come hang out with them. I've been dying to hang out, but I have to leave at a certain time. I can't be here after 5:00 p.m., or something. It kind of takes a toll on me, because I hate that I always bail on everybody, but they understand why. They don't blame me. But, I always wish I could just hang out and have time with everybody. If I'm stuck down here, how will I go places, because I have no car? It takes a toll on me, but I'm kind of okay with it.

With this limitation, Anna's social life and social circles were generally limited to the friends she made during her first year and the friends she would make in her classes. However, Anna made a valiant effort to search for other Hmong American students at Coral Tree University by searching common Hmong last names in the campus directory; this will be discussed in

the next chapter. Therefore, she had connections to other Hmong American students on campus, even if the Hmong Club could not endure. Anna also shared that although her boyfriend did not attend college, he was very supportive and helpful with keeping her on track with her schoolwork.

Adam was a Lao American transfer student, and these identities made it difficult for him to find others who were similar. He knew of no other Lao American students at Coral Tree University, and there was no Lao Club for him to join. He was aware of the Vietnamese Club and other Southeast Asian American student groups, but he did not feel a sense of belonging to those groups. Adam admitted that he would have liked to have seen other Lao American students at the university to gain a sense of familiarity. Instead, Adam found a connection with Latino students at Coral Tree University. He shared:

> I'm really close to their families too. I guess we can relate because they act so similar. They're like, "Are you hungry?" It's like, "You should eat. You should eat." And just shove it in your face. It just feels like home.

The similarity in family dynamics was comfortable to Adam, and he felt a stronger connection to Latino students than other groups. Since he was not able to find a group of Lao American students to form a community with, Adam searched for one that felt culturally familiar.

During his freshman year, Ethan questioned why he was at Redwood University when there were larger issues impacting his community. Ethan struggled with the transition to a quarter system as well as feeling "intimidated" by other students because he entered college with less social capital; he ended up on academic probation during the winter quarter. Not only was Ethan struggling to adjust to the college experience, he was also dealing with the harsh realities of his home community. During this period, he learned that his friend was

the victim of a drive-by shooting. Ethan had no outlets for expressing his emotions, and because it was still early in his college transition, he had few friends he could turn to for emotional support. His college friends could listen to him, but they did not understand the culture and violence in his community. Ethan began to question why he was at Redwood University and not working to support his community. He shared:

> I felt helpless not being in Sacramento and being part of my friends that felt affected by this…That was one of the challenging experiences emotionally—going away for college and not being able to be part of that situation and supportive at that time…I guess my mentality at the time, I was just thinking, "What's the point of pursuing a degree, a criminology degree, when these things are happening in the community? And I might be the next person that's on the newspaper or something." That was my mentality because I felt like it was worthless to study in class 'cause there's these existing issues that are happening in the community, and how's it gonna help, ya know? 'Cause I don't want to document my people's struggles in the book 'cause the book won't do anything. It's about the direct action that people take being emotionally invested in the situation and speaking their pain. But I guess, overall, I identified reasons to continue my education just cause like there's not a lot of Southeast Asian folks that go to higher institution and also for first generation students it's a very rare opportunity to.

Ethan negotiated his student identity and his grassroots activist identity to decide that he needed to pursue higher education for himself and for those in his community that were not provided the same opportunities. He channeled this experience as a source of motivation to succeed and graduate from college. Although this period of his life was extremely emotionally and academically challenging, Ethan expressed, "But I also kind of grew stronger through the experience by being able to get this degree, like I'm graduating for him ya know." Since his freshman year, Ethan worked tirelessly to develop programming and organizations to support the Southeast Asian American student community at Redwood University and aspired to return home and serve his community after college.

Students' identities as people of color. Salient in some students' college experiences were their identities as students of color and how these identities led to feelings of

marginalization at their universities. Although I focus on campus racial climate in the next chapter, this section highlights two examples from students who found it challenging to be minoritized students at their universities. Molly was dissatisfied with the campus racial climate at Redwood University and did not think the administration was doing enough to support diverse students. Molly found it difficult to be a person of color at Redwood University even with the large percentage of Asian American and Pacific Islander students on campus:

> In terms of being the student of color on campus—having to kind of endure the violence inflicted on students of color, either through actions, either through writing, through whatever other medium it may be. And then just having to deal with it.

Despite these incidents and experiences, Molly thought it was important to remember that there was a community at Redwood University for students of color and that there were some institutional efforts to support these communities and provide safe spaces. However, she also explained:

> I'm very thankful for this space. But at the same time, understanding that people who have control over the [cultural center]—like, their employment is through administration. Administration goes into higher up and the UC system, the UC president, et cetera. So there's a lot of politics behind that. So then for me, it's like, yes, I'm really happy it's here, but I also know that it's being very controlled. But you know, you have to give and take what you can get.

Molly remained cognizant of the fact that campus resource centers had limits due to university bureaucracy and did not think they were truly "free" spaces. Kim also found it difficult to be a person of color at Coral Tree University. Not only did she have an uncomfortable orientation experience at the university, she also felt marginalized in her ethnocentric communication major and uncomfortable in the general campus environment. Kim shared her orientation experience:

> It was really hard for me to bond with my orientation group, because they physically distanced themselves from me. Like, I remember I would I ask a question and people would look at me and not answer, and it was just really weird. Even my orientation leader noticed and he didn't know what to do about it. It was really weird, it was like, "Am I in the 60's right now…?" And I remember one of the people in my group was sitting next to me and he looked at me and I smiled like, "Hey," ya know. I'm hoping to bond with my orientation group, and he gets up and moves two chairs over. And I was like, "What, is this really happening?"…Even to this day, I'm like, "What was going on?" I really just don't know. And so I feel like a general uncomfortableness sometimes, because I feel like it's almost like I don't belong, but it's not explicitly said, that I just feel uncomfortable.

Due to these kinds of experiences and her general lack of comfort, Kim immersed herself in spaces like the campus cultural center and ethnic student clubs and organizations and actively worked to advance issues of social justice on campus and in the community. She shared, "I think it's mainly if I didn't have these organizations, I probably would have transferred out."

Students who have considered leaving the university. Eleven of the twenty-four students shared that they had considered leaving the university, would transfer to another university, or took extended breaks due to feeling overwhelmed with school and other commitments. Of these eleven students, seven students seriously considered leaving during their first year of college and one student entertained the idea during his second year. For many of these students, the desire to leave was a combination of homesickness, feelings of loneliness/isolation/marginalization, a lack of close friendships or support system, feeling lost in the system of higher education, finances, and dissatisfaction with their academic performance. The first few years of college was a rough transition for students who were used to excelling academically, having close bonds and friendships, being near their family, and being near their community. These first two years were critical times for students to decide what they really wanted for their future and themselves, learn to develop friendships that would serve students socially, academically, and emotionally, and increase their

involvement in campus activities and organizations. In this section, I share the stories of Jasmine and Isabel, and how they overcame the desire to leave school.

Due to a combination of academics, roommate issues, and loneliness, Jasmine desperately wanted to go home at the end of her first year and not return to Redwood University. She shared:

> I just wasn't having fun. I wasn't experiencing college like people should experience college, especially my first quarter. I thought roommates were supposed to be fun, and everything was supposed to be good. And it wasn't good. And I was sad. And I was homesick. And I cried a lot. And I was just really, like, I just wanted to be home. And my first year, too, I just wanted to get out of there…School was just really hard for me to adjust to…I felt like I could leave if I wanted to. And I just wanted to go to Cal State Long Beach or something. And it was like I could be closer to home. And I could be not wasting all this money. And I wouldn't have to be taking out loans or anything.

Jasmine put a lot of consideration into these plans because she had such a rough first year, but she talked herself out of this decision. To Jasmine, leaving Redwood University was not a realistic option. Jasmine said, "I just had to stick through it because I already made the decision because I didn't want to be wishy-washy. And that's something that my dad really didn't like for people to be like that." As a result of her own determination and the fear of disappointing her parents, Jasmine returned to Redwood University the following year. In an effort to develop more friendships, she became more involved with the Cambodian Club and some of the members are now her closest friends.

Isabel also had a very rough transition during her first year of college. She entered as a biochemistry major and struggled through all of her science courses. In addition to this, Isabel was lonely and lacked a support system. She described how she confided in her mother about these emotions:

> It was a really lonesome experience to get through college—just confused and unsure of a lot of things. And I think my mom tried offering some support; I finally broke

> down to her. I was like, "I can't—I don't know if I can do this," and she tried offering support through the phone, but, I mean, there's only so much she could say or do, and for her to have seen me broken down like that was actually startling to her, because she always saw me as very calm and collected.

Things began to change when Isabel met a friend in one of her courses, and they initially bonded over badminton, but quickly learned that they were experiencing the same emotions about leaving Coral Tree University and returning home to the Bay Area. They made a list of all of the benefits of moving back home, which included saving money and the variety of food options in the Bay Area. However, Isabel and her friend both knew they were not quite ready to give up on Coral Tree University. She explained:

> The idea that of it just sounded really good, but I think what really kept us was just that the—there's a possibility of a change here in our experience. And that – I don't know, toughing it out might be worth it in the end, and it definitely was. We just went over—we went through our freshmen year and we thought, well, what didn't we like about our freshman year? So, we picked it out, and I was like, I really don't like my major. I wanna make more friends. I wanna do more things. And so, we're like, okay. Well, maybe, we should try to make those changes for our second year. And so, that's when I made the switch to sociology. That's when I decided to join a fraternity. I think it was once we started making these changes. You have to—of course, you have to be active about these things, but you just don't really see it until you do it, and so I think I'm really glad that we decided to stay.

Once Isabel and her friend developed this plan of action for their second year, Isabel's perceptions of her college experience changed drastically. Not only did Isabel join a service fraternity during her second year, she also joined the Cambodian Club during her third year to reconnect with her Khmer identity. Both of these involvements helped her develop a strong support system at Coral Tree University. Isabel expressed, "I'm just overwhelmed with an abundance of support and people who are willing to help and reach out." Isabel had the support of a friend who also needed similar encouragement; together, they learned that the key to changing their college experience was through their own willingness to create change.

Summary of why students chose to persist in the university. Despite many students developing serious considerations about leaving their university, none of these students actually decided to leave. There were several individual reasons, but also some clear patterns that arose across different students' experiences. Students displayed a sense of hope that their situation could change, and they were determined not to give up on their opportunity to be at a prestigious research university. Related to this, students did not want to disappoint their parents; Jasmine and Nathan specifically shared that their parents were one of the main reasons they chose to persist. Most importantly, all of the students also developed a willingness to create change; this included: finding students who shared similar interests or were culturally familiar, getting involved in different student clubs and organizations, or using their sense of agency to create student organizations where there was a void that did not fit their needs. Through these experiences, students met staff members and peers who became mentors and encouraged them to become more involved on campus. To pay it forward, some students used these past experiences to become mentors to students they knew who needed mentorship. The challenges that these students faced during their first two years of college became a source of motivation to shape their own college experiences in order to be successful and graduate.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the sources of support and sources of challenge that were most salient to these Southeast Asian American students' educational experiences. In terms of support, we saw how high school outreach programs, family, mentors, peers, organizations, and campus resource centers were valuable resources for students' transition from high school to college and during their university experience. They each provided

students with opportunities to gain academic, social, and emotional support. In addition to this, we also saw how the college application process, their own mental roadblocks, other people, academic difficulties, financial difficulties, and feelings of loneliness, isolation, and marginalization led to challenges for students to work through. Despite the fact that nearly half of the students considered leaving their university early on in their college experience, they chose to persist through these challenges. In this process, students learned about what they needed to succeed and how they were going to create those changes in order to succeed.

What stands out in this discussion about sources of support and sources of challenge for Southeast Asian American University students was the critical nature of the first and second years of college. This transitional period was a struggle for many of the students and an opportune time for students to have mentors and professional counselors guiding them through this process. Although some students entered with mentors from high school, the majority did not. As we saw, mentors came in all forms—peers, staff, and faculty members. Although some students will eventually find their own mentors through various involvements and experiences, others will slip through the cracks and continue their education without the guidance they want or need. It would be helpful for universities to establish mentoring programs for students to have access to culturally responsive mentors when they enter the university. This could help students navigate through their mix of emotions and experiences. Not only were many of the students in this study dealing with homesickness, they were also having trouble connecting to students who understood their identities as well as adjusting to the rigor of university academics. Of course, these experiences do not include the individual issues they may be experiencing such as financial hardship, death of friends or family members, and struggling as a commuter or transfer student. What was also mentioned in

several interviews was a lack of knowledge, fear, or uncertainty regarding professional counselors (academic and mental health) at their universities. Although these services are introduced during most freshmen orientations, that information is not likely to stick with students if they are focusing on how excited/nervous/scared they are about their college experience during those initial weeks. These resources need to be de-stigmatized and frequently advertised to students as accessible and necessary components of their college experience. With that being said, the most important aspect to recognize about this chapter is that all 24 students were persisting in the university despite the challenges they faced and thanks to the support they received.

Chapter 7

Southeast Asian American Students' Campus Racial Climate Experiences

This chapter focuses on Southeast Asian American students' campus racial climate experiences. To reiterate, Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) defined campus racial climate as, "the overall racial environment of the university that could potentially foster outstanding academic outcomes and graduation rates for all students," (p. 664) but is so rarely the case for students of color. These scholars outlined a positive campus racial climate as having: 1) students, faculty, and administrators of color, 2) curriculum that reflects the history and experiences of people of color, 3) programs that support the recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color, and 4) an institutional commitment to diversity. These definitions by Yosso and colleagues (2009) framed how I analyzed the data and presented the findings in this chapter.

Overall, the findings suggested that Southeast Asian American students at Redwood and Coral Tree Universities experienced a negative campus racial climate. As presented in Table 33, overall, only 42% (10) of students were satisfied vs. 58% (14) who were unsatisfied with the campus racial climate at their university. Many of the students appeared to rate campus racial climate by the presence of diverse student populations on their campus, to which all students acknowledged that there was some semblance of a diverse student population but not a satisfactory amount for the majority of the students.

Table 33
Student Satisfaction with the Campus Racial Climate

	Yes, satisfied	No, not satisfied
Redwood University	5	7
Coral Tree University	5	7
Total	10 (42%)	14 (58%)

The rest of this chapter presents data that supports the argument that Southeast Asian American students experienced negative campus racial climates. First, I discuss students' perceptions and experiences of the number of Southeast Asian American and co-ethnic students, faculty, staff, and administrators at their universities. Second, I present data on students' perceptions of the overall campus diversity. Third, I discuss how students perceived their identity to be viewed and valued at their university. Fourth, I transition to students' experiences of racism and racial microaggressions. Fifth, I discuss the impact of these experiences and students' perceptions of the negative campus climate. Lastly, I present data on how students' view the role of the university and their responsibility to create a more positive campus racial climate.

The Presence of Southeast Asian Americans/Co-Ethnics at Redwood and Coral Tree University

At both universities, Southeast Asian American students recognized their presence as minoritized persons, including among the large Asian American student body at Redwood University. Additionally, the overwhelming majority of students lacked contact with or knowledge of Southeast Asian American faculty, staff, or administrators at their university. Although a few of the students did not mind the lack of culturally familiar persons, the majority of students expressed a desire for a larger population of Southeast Asian American students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

The presence of Southeast Asian American/ co-ethnic students. Due to the fact that Southeast Asian American students were statistically a clear minority on both campuses, students were asked if they considered there to be a sufficient number of Southeast Asian American or co-ethnic students at their university. They answered the "yes" or "no" question

on the survey based on what they considered to be a sufficient number of students for themselves, and these responses were elaborated upon during their interview. According to survey responses, the overwhelming majority (71% and 75% respectively) did not consider there to be a sufficient number of Southeast Asian American students or a sufficient number of co-ethnic students. This is illustrated in Table 34.

Table 34
Southeast Asian American and Co-Ethnic Students

	Sufficient # of SEAA students		Sufficient # of students of the same ethnicity		Purposely seek friends who are SEAA/same ethnicity	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Redwood University	2	10	3	9	5	7
Coral Tree University	5	7	3	9	7	5
Total	7 (29%)	17 (71%)	6 (25%)	18 (75%)	12 (50%)	12 (50%)

However, these numbers did not paint a complete picture of how students felt about the population of Southeast Asian Americans or co-ethnics at their university. Two students who answered "yes" to both questions, genuinely considered there to be a sufficient number of students for their liking. On the other hand, other students who marked "yes" to either of the questions considered the size of their ethnic group in comparison to other Southeast Asian ethnic groups. For example, students who were Vietnamese American were more likely to say there was a sufficient number of co-ethnics, because they were the largest Southeast Asian American ethnic group at both universities. It is worth noting that Redwood University was located next to the largest population of Vietnamese Americans outside of Vietnam. Conversely, students from the smaller ethnic groups (Hmong and Cambodian American) were more likely to respond that was a sufficient number of Southeast Asian American

students. The number of students in each ethnic club reflected the differences in student population size. Several students from both universities remarked on the nearly non-existent Lao American student population on their campus; the lack of a Lao Club on both campuses and the difficulty in searching for research participants supported this observation. In fact, many of the students commented that I was the only Lao American person they had met on both campuses.

Students were keenly aware that the majority of Asian American students on their campuses were East Asian American students and knew the campus viewed them similarly. Southeast Asian American students had to be sought out; they were not a visible population. Kim expressed her thoughts on the small population of students:

> I feel like it's hard for me to meet other Southeast Asian students unless I seek them out, unless I purposely go to [the Cambodian Club] or [the Vietnamese Club] or anything like that, ya know…I feel like it's not sufficient because I really have to seek these students out if I want to interact with them. It's so hard sometimes, like even with [the Cambodian Club]—they're such a small club and they have so much trouble reaching out to other Khmer and Cambodian students, ya know, and same thing with [the Vietnamese Club]. I feel like there's such a small number, and it kind of contributes to people not understanding AAPI culture and SEAA culture and everything.

Kim's awareness of the ramifications of being invisible contributed to why she worked tirelessly to support her fellow Southeast Asian American students through her many involvements at Coral Tree University, including a position as co-chair of the Vietnamese Club. Other students did not have as much luck in their search for co-ethnics. Anna was motivated to find other Hmong students after being invited to an event from the Hmong Club at Redwood University. She described how she conducted her search:

> So it brought to my attention that I know some Hmong students, and I know there are more, but I didn't know if there were a lot. So, I tried to go in that U-mail directory. Yang is such a popular last name—Chinese and other Hmong. I emailed everybody who I thought was Hmong, and introduced myself to them—"If possible, this year,

> we can meet and get to know each other. Know that we're here. You may have your own crowd, but there is a Hmong community here, too." It never really worked out because everyone is so busy. But, I know there is a good amount, but there are not as many as at [Redwood University] or other schools.

Anna described a "good amount" as an estimate of 10 other Hmong students. Her belief that having 10 other Hmong students at Coral Tree University was a "good" number demonstrated Anna's cognizance of the low number of Hmong Americans enrolled in selective research institutions, and she tried her hardest to create a community with students she found. Unfortunately, Coral Tree University was not able to sustain a Hmong Club because the population and number of students interested in creating a club was too small. Finding other Southeast Asian American students required student agency, so this calls into question the number of students on both campuses who were not interested in finding other Southeast Asian American students or newer students who did not know how to seek out these groups.

For Sophia, her discontentment with the low population of Southeast Asian/Asian Americans was so acute that she considered leaving Coral Tree University and transferring to a university with a denser population of Southeast Asian and Asian American students with the hopes of having more opportunity to make friends who understood her identity and background. She described her situation:

> Sometimes I think that I chose the wrong school…[At the university up north], I feel like they have a bigger Asian population than we do, so there's that. And like food-wise, there's more Asian food around them also. Just, I guess it was the culture…I actually did recently [try to transfer out of Coral Tree University] but then I found out that I'm probably going to exceed the transfer units by the time I get to apply, so I'm stuck…

To her disappointment, Sophia learned that it was too late for her to transfer to another university. Despite being part of the Cambodian Club and having close friends from the club, it was not enough for her to feel like she belonged at Coral Tree University.

Students who did not mind the low populations of Southeast Asian American and co-ethnic students appreciated being part of what they considered to be a diverse student population and other students' race/ethnicity did not matter to them. For example, Tom shared his feelings about ethnic clubs and seeking friendships with other Southeast Asian American students:

> I don't like seeing groups of Asians hanging out with only Asians. It almost makes me feel like it's not that you picked those Asians, but you excluded every other race. I don't see any reason to surround myself with only one type of culture. I want to absorb everything. I'm not saying people who do join them are ignorant, but it's just not my cup of tea.

Tom appreciated the diversity at Coral Tree University and surrounded himself with diverse friends. However, he was not blind to racial incidents that occurred for students of color on campus and in the neighboring community, some of which he experienced himself. Alex, from Redwood University, felt similarly in that he viewed others as individuals:

> I like to look at people because of their people. The friends I've made at [Redwood University], even though I'm not that close with them, I'm close enough with them that they won't judge me just by looking at me. It's like, "Hey! We're a diverse community- so what if I'm Asian, so what if I'm white, so what if I'm brown-haired or black?" It's like, "Hey we're all individuals here"…They look past what's on the outside and look at who the person is as an individual.

Alex did not develop deep friendships with many friends because he invested his time into his research and relationship with his partner, Vivian. Alex was also involved in the Hmong Club and held a leadership role for the past two years. It is worth noting that both Tom and Alex's pathways have included periods of discontentment with their culture and practices they witnessed. For example, Tom believed in assimilating into mainstream American

culture and looked down on his father who lived in a Vietnamese enclave, and Alex disagreed with the gender dynamics in traditional Hmong culture. Neither of them made a point to have Vietnamese, Hmong, or Southeast Asian American friends as they grew older.

Students were also asked if they purposely sought out Southeast Asian American or co-ethnic friends at their university. The results can be seen in the previous Table 34. Although the survey responses were split down the middle, several students who responded "no" on their surveys shared similar interview responses as students who responded "yes." Students clarified that their "yes" responses did not mean that they were not willing to form friendship with students of other races, but that they found it easier to connect with students who were similar to themselves—through a shared culture and sometimes language. Isabel shared why she did purposely seek out Southeast Asian American or Khmer American friends:

> There's just like a different type of connection that – well, for me at least, like when I first met [Sophia], we just instantly connected on that level. We were able to relate to the foods we really like to eat, to how our family functions, how our parents react to things, our siblings…There's just a different level of being able to relate to each other that I don't even share it with my best friend at home or even the friend I made my freshman year. And so, I purposely seek them out just for that because it's very –it's really enjoyable to be in the company of someone who shares the same background as you.

Sophia responded similarly to Isabel, who shared that it was easier to discuss family issues with friends who understood her culture and family dynamics. She said, "When I talk to some of my friends on the rugby team who aren't Asian and I'll them about it, like the most they can say is like, 'Wow, that really sucks.'" Sophia felt she could discuss these struggles with friends like Isabel who understood why she was not able to communicate openly with her parents. Jeff, who answered "no" on his survey, said in his interview:

> I wouldn't say it was important, probably just slipped my mind and actually it just happened. But I guess I got accustomed to what I was used to at home, and I guess that's how it worked out. Yea, I just felt more comfortable with people of my culture.

Several students unintentionally gravitated towards friends who were more similar to them culturally and personality-wise while others made a point to seek out culturally familiar friends. Isabel, Sara, and Jeff's comments implied that these friendships produced a connection that required less effort than friendships with peers who were culturally different. Students did not have to continually explain their difference in these friendships.

The presence of Southeast Asian American faculty, staff, and administrators. Only half of the students had interacted with a Southeast Asian American faculty member, only five students interacted with Southeast Asian American staff member, and the one student who responded "yes" to interacting with a Southeast Asian American administrator was not sure whether the individual was a staff member or administrator. This is presented in Table 35.

Table 35
Southeast Asian American Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

	Interacted with SEAA faculty		Interacted with SEAA staff		Interacted with SEAA administrators	
	Yes	No/Don't know any	Yes	No/Don't know any	Yes	No/Don't know any
Redwood University	6	6	4	8	1	11
Coral Tree University	6	6	1	11	0	12
Total	12 (50%)	12 (50%)	5 (21%)	19 (79%)	1 (4%)	23 (96%)

All but one interaction with faculty members took place in an Asian American Studies course; one student had a Southeast Asian American faculty member in his Vietnamese language course in the Humanities program. Students who did have the opportunity to meet

and take courses with Southeast Asian American faculty members were really inspired by their work and experiences. Amelia shared that she had never had Southeast Asian American teachers in her K-12 education, so she did not expect to see any when she came to Redwood University. She found three Southeast Asian American faculty members in the Asian American Studies department that she respected and felt inspired by. Amelia shared:

> It makes me grateful that there are pioneers of starting this (Oral History Project) on this campus but also within the community also. I feel so special having taken a class with Professor Nguyen, who is super amazing. I love what she's done. I don't even know how to begin to describe them. They're just super awesome in what they do and they're really pushing for issues in the community and trying to address them. They're here too, and they're working with students. It's not like they're just professors who are only caring about their research, they actually care about the well-being of their students and actually come into contact and interact with students.

Molly felt similarly about the faculty in the Asian American Studies department at Redwood University. These faculty were important role models for students and provided them with a pathway they could follow for their future careers. Molly shared how she felt inspired by one of the faculty members in the department:

> Meeting professors like Professor Truong—I think she's amazing. I think she does really great things. I'm always very, like, in a state of awe whenever I'm around her because I just think, like, she's so humble in what she does. She doesn't think it's a big deal, but it's a big deal. And then just understanding her role from being a professor and now to being an archivist. And so it's been very interesting to know that. And also the fact that it also really influenced me because she is a woman and to see her in such high roles really influences me and what I want to do.

This was the first time many of students encountered a Southeast Asian American educator, and more importantly, these were educators who were also invested in the Southeast Asian American community through their research and community work. Molly and Amelia were able to identify with these faculty members and see concrete possibilities for their future. Students interacted with Southeast Asian American staff members in student housing at Coral Tree University and the library's Southeast Asian Archives at Redwood University.

The individual who was considered as both a staff member and administrator was a program coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity. What's important to note is that these are mostly culturally specific spaces or spaces that were created for diverse student populations. Students had not interacted with Southeast Asian American faculty members in courses outside of Asian American Studies or language classes or with Southeast Asian American staff members/administrators who were not connected with their ethnic clubs and organizations. An overwhelming number of students (79% and 96% respectively) had never interacted with or did not know of any Southeast Asian American staff or administrators at their university. Similar to the student population, Southeast Asian American faculty, staff, and administrators had to be sought out at these universities. Data on the actual number of Southeast Asian American faculty, staff, and administrators and both universities could not be found.

Campus (Lack of) Diversity

The majority of students at Redwood University and Coral Tree University considered their university diverse, but not diverse enough. Students at Redwood University, the predominantly Asian American student body, noted this fact but pointed out that the majority of Asian Americans were East Asian American. Students at Coral Tree University were aware of the predominantly white study body on their campus, but both Beth and Isabel thought the number of Asian American students had increased since their freshmen year. Students were asked to discuss any aspect of diversity they wished to discuss, not just on racial diversity and the presence of Southeast Asian Americans. At least six students remarked on the disappointingly low population of black students at their university, and three students discussed the invisibility of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender)

communities. Isabel shared her feelings about the lack of an Asian American LGBTQ community at Coral Tree University:

> I don't think there is a huge presence of an LGBT community. And when I went up to [another university] there is just such a contrast. They were definitely more visible…And, I guess delving more into the LGBT community, I've noticed that a lot of them are white. It would be really nice to see more queer Asian Americans. When I was at the conference [up north]…It was specifically for queer Asian-Americans, and so that had a different feel…I felt like I could instantly connect to a lot of people. And so coming back, I wished we had that sort of environment here as well—or at least a space for it…

Not only did Isabel desire a larger Cambodian American population, she also desired an Asian American LGBTQ community. Isabel's quote exemplified students' intersectional identities, how sometimes, the lack of support and community for these identities can lead to further feelings of marginalization.

Several students were dissatisfied with the level of diversity on their campus and critical of their university's efforts to support diversity. I provide an example from each university in this section. Amelia expressed her views about level of diversity at Redwood University:

> I think they definitely do value diversity but I feel like it's a very superficial definition of diversity. We have this person from an underrepresented group here so that means we're diverse, right? I'm not saying that's what the university does but sometimes that means we're diverse all of a sudden. In terms of admin, at least to my knowledge, I don't think there is many Southeast Asian admins at UCI. So you can see the level of diversity. Even in men and women in admin and faculty and staff.

Kim considered Coral Tree University a hostile environment for students of color and the LGBTQ community:

> I don't think it's very good, because I feel like out of all the [schools in the university] system, I feel like this school—as sad as it is—I feel like it's a pretty good representation of how American society is like. There is the white majority and the people of color minorities and everything…I just feel like it's not diverse. The black student population—like there's only 3% and there's a lot of LGBT people here in general—and even then I feel like it's really hard to come out if you attend this

> university because not everyone is open and people are very mean… I feel like those are one of those buzz words, like "Yea diversity!" and everything ya know, but it's not really valued. I think that's something that they would say is valued and we strive for, but they're not doing really any active things about it.

Not only were these students critical of the lack of racial diversity in the study body, they were also cognizant of the lack of diversity among gender, the LGBTQ community, and university staff. Both Amelia and Kim were Asian American Studies majors at their respective universities and developed a critical lens of their worlds, including their campus community. They were also both highly involved in the social justice community and invested in supporting diverse students' success at their universities.

Students' Southeast Asian American Identities

According to the survey, 25% (6) of students felt that their identities as Southeast Asian Americans were valued at their university, 4% (1) was not sure, and 71% (17) felt that their identities were not valued at their university. This can be seen in Table 36 below.

Table 36
Southeast Asian American Identity

	Yes	No	Yes & No
Redwood University	2	9	1
Coral Tree University	4	8	0
Total	6 (25%)	17 (71%)	1(4%)

Several students who marked "yes" on their surveys provided more depth as to why they felt their identities were valued during the interview. Jack's Cambodian Club received an email of support for their Cambodian Culture Night show from Coral Tree University's Chancellor, and this proved to him that the administration was aware of and supported their presence at the university. Other students, such as Jasmine, Nathan, and Isabel, felt that their Southeast

Asian American identities were only valued in certain spaces—ethnic clubs and cultural centers. Jasmine said, "I think it's valued because of the club, but I don't know how valued we are to everyone else as a whole…because there isn't an opportunity for us to speak our minds and be prominent." Outside of these spaces, several students felt that their Southeast Asian American identities were invisible or denied.

Half of the students expressed in their interviews that they did not think their identities were valued because of the lack of knowledge and awareness about the Southeast Asian American community and their difference from the Asian American community. Several students also alluded to the problem of the model minority myth. Molly explained why she was working so hard to abolish this myth:

> I, myself, am very tired of having to constantly explain things to people and then having to constantly have them understand that my experiences are a lot different and there's a specific context to why I identify as Southeast Asian instead of just saying I'm API or Asian or something like that.

Other students were also "tired" of having to explain how their identities were different from other Asian American groups. Anna had a lot of pride in her identity as a Hmong American despite people's ignorance of her community's role in the Vietnam War:

> I know Hmong people aren't really that well-known. So, I come here, and people would ask what I am. I would tell them, but I hate explaining what I am. I don't mind, but the fact that you continuously have to say who you are. It's sad to know that not a lot of people are aware that the Hmong community exists. I'm kind of ashamed that we aren't really out there. But, it's not going to stop me from being Hmong. I'm okay with me. If people don't know who we are, it's okay. If they do, it's a shock because not a lot of people know us. I wish a lot of people could see what we did. But, if the Hmong hard work in the Vietnam War is not going to be acknowledged then, it's okay. We can wish for it. If it happens, great. If not, it's not going to affect us. We're still Hmong.

Although students took on the responsibility of educating their peers about their communities, it also appeared to take an emotional toll on them because they seemed

overwhelmed with the number of people who were unaware of their communities. Other students, like Vivian, considered this as motivation to further promote her ethnic club and educate the campus community. Students also understood that the lack of knowledge about Southeast Asian American communities extended beyond the student body. Ethan was critical of the university administration and their lack of efforts to support the Southeast Asian American student body at Redwood University:

> The reason why I feel that way (why his identity as a Southeast Asian American is not valued) is because Administration, historically, has not voiced the concerns of Southeast Asians lack of access to the university, and not providing enough resources for retention and outreach work for specific ethnic groups and also compared to other universities that have established or institutionalized programs to help the Southeast Asian community, like for example [a Southeast Asian American outreach and retention center] and [a Southeast Asian American summer program] and a Southeast Asian Studies Department. I think that, yes, [Redwood University] is still in the movement and creating more visibility, but it's very overwhelming for students to continue to voice their concerns when there's no support from the Administration and just with support of Asian American Studies staff who are Southeast Asian. So I feel like historically, even with the Project Ngoc movement in the 1970s with a student group that voiced their concerns about human rights and stopping repatriation, that administration has not voiced or allocated resources for future generations of Southeast Asian students and just like outreaching to community more.

As a student who was heavily involved in campus organizations that spanned across other California universities, Ethan was critical of the administration for not acknowledging Southeast Asian American students as an underrepresented group in higher education. Ethan shared:

> I guess with the assumption that Asian Americans are prominent at the university, I think in my opinion, it's challenging for other racial groups or underrepresented groups like African Americans and Latinos to understand the struggles within the API community—especially with Administration setting up the image for people to see it that way.

The large Asian American and Pacific Islander American student body at Redwood University shielded administration from having to put substantial effort into support the

Southeast Asian American student body. Despite the ignorance of the campus community, students were proud of their Southeast Asian American identities as Anna's quote exemplified.

Also as part of this invisibility, the majority of students (71%) did not think they had enough opportunities to express their cultural heritage at their universities, and only 38% of students had the opportunity to take a course that reflected their history or cultural heritage even though 96% of students were interested in taking such courses. This can be seen in Table 37. Of course, some students admitted that course schedules were also what impeded some of them from taking a course in ethnic studies beyond what was required. Others were disappointed that even Asian American Studies courses did not fully complete their desire to learn about their history and cultural heritage; this was acutely felt by Lao, Hmong, and Cambodian American students. Anna had taken several Asian American Studies classes at Coral Tree University but was disappointed with the invisibility of Hmong Americans in her courses:

> If there was a class like that, I honestly think that all of the Hmong students would be really interested in it. I think a lot of the Hmong community really loves to hear about ourselves. We're not really in textbooks. We're not really known. So, for somebody to put us out there, it gives us an appreciation. We want to support it. If you have a class dedicated to at least the Hmong community in general, I think that any Hmong student on campus would add it.

Adding a minor in Asian American Studies had crossed Anna's mind, but she appeared hesitant because of the lack of attention to the Hmong community in the department's courses.

Table 37
Opportunities to Learn About and Connect with Their Cultural Heritage

	Have had opportunities to take courses that reflect your history/cultural heritage		Interested in taking courses that reflect your history/cultural heritage		Have had enough opportunities to express your cultural heritage	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Redwood University	6	6	11	1	5	7
Coral Tree University	3	9	12	0	2	10
Total*	9 (38%)	15 (63%)	23 (96%)	1 (4%)	7 (29%)	17 (71%)

*Note. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding error.

The lack of opportunities to express their cultural heritage and limited curriculum correlated with how some students felt about their university administration's denial of their underrepresented status. Students at Coral Tree University argued that the administration's aggregate view of Asian American students contributed to the negligence of the Southeast Asian American community. Ethan expressed his thoughts on this issue:

> The reason why I feel that way is because administration, historically, has not voiced the concerns of Southeast Asians lack of access to the university, and not providing enough resources for retention and outreach work for specific ethnic groups…also compared to other universities that have established or institutionalized programs to help the Southeast Asian community.

Chloe, who felt similarly, said, "I think once you realize that there's this community that has these similar experiences with you, you realize that there's not a lot of resources for this community." These students wanted more institutional recognition and institutional responsibility for the success of their community. Without the university acknowledging their community, their struggles and efforts felt overlooked.

Experiences of Racism and Racial Microaggressions

A high majority (71%) of students experienced incidents of racism or racial microaggressions on their campus, and three of the seven students who had not personally experienced any racism or racial microaggressions knew friends who had. This is presented in Table 38.

Table 38
Experienced Incidents of Racism and Racial Microaggressions

	Yes	No
Redwood University	8	4
Coral Tree University	9	3
Total	17 (71%)	7 (29%)

Rather than blatant acts of racism, the majority of these incidents came in the form of racial microaggressions. To reiterate, Pierce (1995) defined racial microaggressions as subtle insults, conscious or unconscious, meant to putdown people of color. Several students remarked that racial microaggressions about being Asian were a common occurrence, to the point that Nathan said, "I like hear that all the time, so I kind of just disregard that." Students recognized but learned to shrug off these disparaging comments. Grace explained:

> They just make racial comments about food…I just hear it all the time. Like, "Oh that Asian girl. Blah, blah, blah, blah."…I hear it, and I see – and people make fun of Asians all the time, with the "ching chong." Okay, that's like the No. 1 thing, and I'm pretty sure there's so many parody videos, or videos that people have made, of Asian people, but honestly, I don't see the school making a big deal out of it, or ever making a big deal out of it.

These microaggressions occurred so frequently that students saw it as part of their campus culture and were disheartened by the lack of action from university administration.

While these incidents of racism and racial microaggressions occurred on both campuses, more than half of the students at Coral Tree University reported that these

incidents were a common occurrence in the neighboring community where the majority of students lived. Jeff, who also felt the tension around campus, shared that these issues were most prevalent in the neighboring community:

> I always just feel that separation everywhere, but it's mainly in [the community]…I've experienced a lot of racism [in the community], and this is where I'm getting most of that experience…Lots of people walk [around the community] at night and they are drunk everything and they'll be rowdy and a lot of them will slur racist comments as people walk by, you know…We are just walking, why would you say stuff like that?

Asian American students received unprovoked racial slurs and racial microaggressions from white students just for walking down the street in the evenings. These experiences also went beyond hurtful words and ignorant comments. Tom was attacked with racial slurs and water balloons while spending an evening at the beach with his girlfriend:

> On Valentine's Day, I was taking [my girlfriend] to dinner at the beach. And, these guys over the balcony just started talking like a bunch of racist stuff about Asians. They started throwing water balloons at me. I was thoroughly annoyed. It ruined my night…They started throwing stuff at me, and yelling at me. I was like, "I don't even know what I did to you" – type thing…I heard, "Asian; Chink." I don't know. I didn't do anything to them. I'm just trying to hang out.

This unprovoked attack, and hate crime, revealed the troubling realities of racist events that go unnoticed and un-policed by the university because this community is not on university property. Beth and Sara's experiences revealed that the intersectional identities of being female and Asian American provoked comments from white males every night they walked around in the community. Beth said:

> People would be like, "Oh, Asian girls. Asian girls," like that…Or like, "Lucy Liu, that's you," or something like that…We hear it all the time. I feel like also we put ourselves in that position where all of us are Asian and all of us are walking down…but then they wouldn't be like, "Oh, white girls!" you know what I mean?

Sara shared similar experiences:

> When I go out on the weekends, not once does someone say something that's like not racist…Like we'll walk down DP, me and my housemates, and maybe because we're a group of Asian girls, but we can hear people say, "Wow. A lot of Asians are out today," or yea…Just kind of rude things that are just very directed…so I've just been getting very annoyed.

Beth and Sara were housemates, and both shared these experiences as a frustrating aspect of their living community. These incidents of racism and racial microaggressions appeared to be embedded in the culture of the community, and these students have learned to persist despite these experiences. Unfortunately, these experiences became a "normal" part of their college experience.

Both Redwood University and Coral Tree University had campus/community events in the past year that shaped students' experiences and views on racism and racial microaggressions. An Asian American-interest fraternity at Redwood University created a recruitment video portraying "blackface," where fraternity members painted their faces black in order to portray black musicians. This led to a campus-wide discussion among students and administrators about race issues. Several students brought up this incident in their interviews and remarked that there was a lot of work and educating that still needed to occur at their university. Many of the students did not think the university handled the issue appropriately, and that the administration missed an opportunity to educate the student body. Asian American students at Coral Tree University were impacted by the hunt for suspects of a rape that occurred in the neighboring campus community. The suspects were identified as Asian American males, and the sketch of the suspects were posted all over the campus and neighboring community. According to students, this resulted in racial profiling and comments of suspicion from their peers; they criticized the sketches as generalized depictions of Asian American males. Jeff shared how a fellow student targeted his roommate:

> He was out one time at a club event or something and a random guy told him, "Don't do it again," and stared at him all night. That really opened my eyes. Like, wow. I can't believe that really happened to him.

Male students revealed that this was an uncomfortable time for them, and they became hyperaware of how other students viewed and treated them during this period.

How Students are Affected by the Campus Racial Climate

The negative campus racial climate experiences affected some students emotionally and/or socially. Kim, Sophia, Sara, Adam, Evelyn, and Grace discussed how they felt like a minority and often times uncomfortable at their university. These feelings were not just the result of some students' experiences of racism and racial microaggressions, but inclusive of the factors outlined by Yosso and colleagues' description of a positive campus racial climate. Although students experienced incidents of racism and racial microaggressions at both universities, these experiences and their effects appeared more salient for students at Coral Tree University. Kim described why she purposely sought out friends with Vietnamese students or other students of color at Coral Tree University:

> I think just coming here and meeting people who didn't relate or understand or blatantly made me feel uncomfortable—like because I identify as a certain way and everything—that I purposely sought out Vietnamese students. Because it's with other Vietnamese students or other people of color students that I can talk about race issues and not feel like people are trying defend themselves, like "It's not my fault," and people can be like "Yea, this is the way it is." I feel like I seek them out for my own mental health because if I can't have these conversations or I'm not around like-minded people it just makes me feel really tired being here basically.

Kim needed to be able to have conversations about race issues with people who would not silence her feelings or experiences, which she commonly felt from white students in her communication major and around campus. As mentioned previously, Kim was actively involved in creating safe spaces for students of color at Coral Tree University. Sophia

discussed how she would like to see more Southeast Asian American students at Coral Tree University:

> I think I would feel more comfortable here. Cause we're not as much of a minority, I guess, even though we'd still be a minority it won't feel like it as much…Since there'd be more people I may have someone who could relate to me…

In addition to this, she had yet to find a course that included curriculum focusing on her history and cultural heritage as a Cambodian American. This disappointed her, because she came to college hoping to learn more about her Cambodian heritage and identity:

> I think it's pretty important, cause I mean, you hear that universities are supposed to be diverse and that they accept all people like no matter what differences there are. So I feel like to not have one, I feel like you're making those people feel very invisible, which is not something I expected, especially from like a pretty liberal campus.

Sophia struggled with the campus climate at Coral Tree University and experienced difficulty trying to find students who could relate to her experiences; she admitted that she lacked a sense of belonging at the university. Many students desired more friends who shared the same experiences—culturally, as low-income students, and/or as first-generation college students.

Some students admitted that they were more likely to become friends with other Asian American students or students and color and less likely to become friends with white students due to the negative experiences they have had at their university. Adam felt a clear hierarchy at Coral Tree University, where white students were at the top of the hierarchy. When asked if he had friends who were white, Adam said, "I have a couple, but they're really open." He admitted feeling slightly uneasy about making white friends, but he shared, "I will talk to them. I would still try, but if I feel like they don't make the effort to do the same, I just quit." Jeff expressed a similar sentiment to Adam's. He shared:

> Well, socially, since the racial profiling and all that and that racism that I experienced kind of made me less likely to talk to maybe a white person…It has affected me a little bit, made me think twice of who I approach, like is this person racist or not. It made me think about that, you know.

Adam and Jeff developed defense mechanisms to assess whether or not they should approach white friends or develop friendships with other white students. This was unfortunate, considering they attended a university with a high percentage of white students and most spaces where likely to be dominated by larger concentrations of white students. Jeff and Adam had both also discussed feeling the tension and segregation in the neighboring community where they lived. Due to the negative campus climate experiences, Jeff invested his social energy into the Vietnamese Club and Adam admitted to feeling more comfortable with the Latino student community since Coral Tree University did not have a Lao Club.

Both Beth and Sara also noticed the segregation between white members and members of color in their respective Pan-Hellenic sororities at Coral Tree University. Sara said, "I definitely felt that they hung out with each other more because they were white…" Beth described the experience in her sorority:

> I joined a Pan-Hellenic sorority…It's very diverse, primarily the white American culture. I just couldn't bond with them. All my close friends from [the sorority] were Asians—Asian and Hispanic. I couldn't bond with, like, the Americans. I just feel like the different culture or like maybe they think of Asians differently? I don't know if it's me. I don't know if it's them. I wish—because I did try to reach out to them in terms of— I tried to expand my horizons…

Beth's description of her experiences revealed that she perceived of white students as representatives of "American" and "American culture," and therefore perceived herself different from them. Beth was a second-generation Vietnamese American, but appeared to have developed an understanding that being American meant being white. This was an area that needed further probing and research but was not a focus of this interview. Sara and

Beth's attempt to make more diverse friendships by joining sororities failed. They felt disillusioned by the segregated friendships and therefore questioned the costs of being part of a sorority; Sara and Beth both quit their sororities after only one year. They shared that their friend group was mainly Asian American, and they were more comfortable having Asian American friends.

Many students have turned to their ethnic clubs and organizations and campus cultural centers as safe spaces at their university. These spaces will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter, but it was important to note in this section that several students commented on the importance of these spaces for students of color. They contributed to feelings of acceptance and belonging and countered the negative campus climate.

The Role of the University

This section discusses how students perceived the role of the university in addressing campus climate issues as well as their understanding of how the university should provide a more positive campus racial climate. Students acknowledged that not all acts of racism and especially racial microaggressions were visible to university administration, and they were confident that their peers would never report many of these incidents. Students had varying opinions about their university's approach to handling campus climate issues. Four students thought that their university was making a good effort to support a positive campus racial climate, but several others were critical of their university's efforts or lack of efforts. The topic of emails arose among students as both a positive effort and a negative effort from the chancellor—Anna and Natalie thought emails from the chancellor condoning racist incidents were an indication of the administration's efforts to support a positive campus climate, while

students such as Grace and Amelia considered emails from the chancellor were insufficient. They argued that emails did not educate students and few students took the time to read their emails. Molly argued that her university needed to do a better job listening to students and their demands; she was dissatisfied with the outcome after the "blackface" video at Redwood University.

Jeff, Sara, Kim, Ethan, and Chloe argued that students were the ones developing more efforts than the university administration to support a positive campus racial climate, despite the university administration being aware of issues occurring on campus. Kim argued:

> I feel like there are resources, but they're resources put together by students, like it's not done by the university—like [the outreach program] is run by students, [the retention center] is run by students, all the different culture clubs are run by students. So I feel like it's not being done. Kind of like even the [campus cultural center]—it's such a small entity within our school and they have to rely on student fees to work, ya know? It's entirely student run and support. The [campus cultural center] is such a big factor in student of color retention, but it's paid for by student fees and even then students are running it. I don't think our school is doing a good job, and I don't think they're really doing anything about it besides providing opportunities for students to do something about it.

Students were critical of the university for not supporting important campus entities, such as outreach and retention centers. Redwood University only recently won enough votes in the student election to secure a permanent space for their outreach and retention center. Students wanted to see the university do more than provide them with the opportunities to do the work, because these efforts competed with their time to focus on their own academics. This topic is expanded upon in the next chapter.

Students provided several suggestions for the university to improve on their efforts. The most prominent suggestions were to institute more ethnic studies requirements and develop more activities and workshops that create awareness and education about diverse student populations.

Amelia thought her peers needed more than just interactions with diverse student populations:

> I think that's why having these ethnic studies classes are super important, because just hearing everyday—every day within my halls I hear certain things, like, "Oh, you're such a black person," or something like that. Certain perceptions and stereotypes that people perpetuate or they even say in their daily lives, it's really common and they're, like, "Oh, I'm not racist. I just said that as a joke." Right. I don't think people understand the implications or the meanings behind what they're saying or what they're doing. I think a lot of people just think about ethnic studies classes as a lot of reading and writing but there are a lot of good readings. I feel like it's a meaningful course that you see it in your community, you see it—if not in your community back home, the community here.

Students considered ethnic studies courses a starting point for their peers to not only learn about communities of color but to also understand the structural aspects of social stratification.

Chloe, Ethan, and Henry also argued that the university needed more diverse staff and faculty members and would like to see their university reinstitute affirmative action. Other students were less optimistic that the university could prevent a negative campus climate, because they considered racism inherent in the individual. Several students remarked that individuals who were racist were raised that way, and it was not something the university could work to change. Tom was uncertain anything could be done to prevent these incidents in Coral Tree's neighboring community:

> I don't know what they can do even if they could. What— do they ticket people for being racist and sexist? We can promote a safer environment, but at the same time, it's almost like when you do stuff like that, it gives people something to rebel against. Then they push their opinions even further. I honestly don't know.

Students wanted to see a more positive campus racial climate, but many were pessimistic about university efforts and real change occurring.

Chapter Summary

Overall, the findings suggested that students at Redwood University and Coral Tree University were experiencing a negative campus racial climate when compared to the standards developed by Yosso and colleagues (2009). First, the majority of students did not consider there to be a sufficient number of Southeast Asian American or co-ethnic students at their university, and the overwhelming majority had never interacted with or did not know of Southeast Asian American faculty, staff, or administrators at their university. Second, although several students had taken ethnic studies and Asian American Studies courses, few felt that the curriculum sufficiently covered their cultural background and/or history. Third, programs existed to support students of color, but many felt that these programs were the result of efforts created by the students, themselves, rather than a concerted effort from their university. Fourth, all students believed that their university valued diversity, or were supposed to value diversity, but many were critical of how their university lived up to these claims. While many students learned to accept the campus climate or ignore racial microaggressions, students who keenly experienced the negative campus racial climate or experienced several incidents of racism or racial microaggressions reported feeling invisible, uncomfortable, marginalized, or less likely to become friends with white students. Students at Coral Tree University were more likely to name white students as the culprits of their experiences of racism and racial microaggressions, likely due to the fact that Coral Tree University had a much higher percentage of white students than other racial groups. This highlights the urgent need for universities to develop more understanding of the incidents of racism and racial microaggressions occurring on their campuses (and student living communities) and work to create more inclusive communities for all students.

Although Southeast Asian American students at both Redwood University and Coral Tree University experienced incidents of racism and racial microaggressions, the data illustrated that these incidents appeared more frequent and of a higher severity at Coral Tree University. These incidents occurred on campus, but they were more prevalent in the neighboring community where the majority of students lived. This finding revealed the importance of understanding off-campus student living communities, and how these unregulated spaces have the potential to negatively impact students' education. The data suggested that students' negative campus (and living) racial climate experiences had negative consequences on students' social and emotional health. While this cannot be considered a cause-and-effect relationship as a qualitative inquiry, the data provided a valuable illustration of how students experience the campus climate at their university.

Chapter 8

How Culturally Validating Environments Help Bridge Southeast Asian American Students' Multiple Worlds

In the previous chapter, I focused on how Southeast Asian American students at Redwood University and Coral Tree University experienced their campus racial climate. The data revealed that the overwhelming majority of students felt that there were an insufficient number of Southeast Asian American and co-ethnic students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The majority of students also felt that they did not have enough opportunities to express their cultural heritage or take courses that reflected their history or cultural heritage. Despite these disheartening findings, the culturally validating environments that did exist at Redwood and Coral Tree Universities were important spaces that provided students with several positive experiences. Previous chapters discussed the various challenges and difficulties (gatekeepers) students experienced on their higher education pathway, but this chapter focuses on the positive aspects (brokers) of their experiences that supported students' persistence and retention.

Culturally Validating Environments and Students' Worlds

Culturally validating environments are spaces at a university that validate students' identities, cultures, histories, families, and communities (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus et al., 2013; Rendón, 1994). In this study, I identified these spaces through the data as ethnic studies courses (primarily Asian American Studies), ethnic clubs and organizations, a campus outreach and retention center, campus cultural centers, and people associated with these spaces (peers, staff, faculty, and teaching assistants). Each of these culturally validating environments served as *cultural/institutional brokers*, individuals and/or groups who

provided resources or support to help students link their worlds (Cooper, 2011). While the Bridging Multiple Worlds framework focused on the main worlds of family, community, school, and peers, this study allowed students to circle and write in as many worlds as they desired. Table 39 lists the main worlds that were selected by at least half of the 24 students.

Table 39
Students' Main Worlds

Worlds	Coral Tree University	Redwood University	Total
Family	12	12	24
Friends (pre-college)	12	9	21
Friends (from college)	10	11	21
College	10	9	19
Clubs/organizations	8	10	18
Extended family	10	7	17
Housemates in college	8	6	14

Note. Only worlds that were chosen by at least 12 or more students are listed in this table.

The rest of this chapter will focus on how culturally validating opportunities provided cultural and institutional brokers that helped Southeast Asian American students bridge their multiple worlds and identities. Five themes emerged from the data that exemplified how students' worlds were bridged. Culturally validating environments: 1) supported students' ethnic identity development, 2) opened lines of communication with parents, 3) allowed for mentoring relationships to develop, 4) supported students' sense of belonging, and 5) helped students develop an awareness of and take action on social issues. Each of these themes are discussed in more detail below.

Supporting Students' Ethnic Identity Development

College was an opportunity for many of these students to explore their identities, including their ethnic identities. For some students, this was the first time they made a concerted effort to explore and connect with their ethnic identity, some solidified and

strengthened their ethnic identity, and others gained the opportunity to reclaim their ethnic identity after periods of shame and anger.

Opportunities to explore their ethnic/Southeast Asian American identities.

Students who grew up isolated from their ethnic communities or near very few co-ethnics felt they lacked the opportunity to explore their ethnic and cultural identity. This was true even if their parents still practiced cultural and religious traditions in the home, because students did not always understand these traditions or they did not communicate with their parents about why these traditions were important. These students also had very little opportunity to become friends with co-ethnic peers, which was something they all desired. Through Asian American Studies courses and their involvement in ethnic clubs, students were able to explore and develop their ethnic and Southeast Asian American identities. In this section, I share the experiences of Sophia, Nathan, and Jack.

Sophia was exposed to ethnic culture clubs during her first year at Coral Tree University, and it left her wondering if there was a Cambodian Club on campus. She took the initiative to conduct a Facebook search and messaged the officers about club meetings. Sophia explained why she hoped to find a Cambodian Club at Coral Tree University:

> Well because in high school, I guess I never really embraced my Cambodian heritage. I also didn't have an outlet for it, because none of my friends were Cambodian or anything like that. And people, a lot of them didn't even know it was a country. They always ask like, "Do they have their own language?" and stuff like that. So I wanted to get to know people who were of the same culture and like expose myself to it.

Some of Sophia's closest friends at Coral Tree University were from the Cambodian Club, and she intentionally sought out friends who would understand her culture and background. At the time of the interview, Sophia was also a member of the Culture Night show and secretary of the club. Although the Cambodian Club had been an important part of her

friendship formations and identity exploration, it had not fully satisfied Sophia's desire for more knowledge about her language, culture and history. Having access to the Cambodian Club at Coral Tree University only fueled her desire for more knowledge about her ethnic identity. Sophia took a course in Asian American Studies that touched on the Khmer Rouge, but she wanted to learn more. Sophia was in need of a cultural broker to help her link her identity with opportunities at Coral Tree University that could help her feel more grounded at the university.

When Nathan's parents moved his family to a wealthier community in order to put him and his brother in better schools during elementary school, Nathan learned he was different from his white, mainstream American friends. Denying his difference, he adopted this identity as a mainstream American up until high school. Once Nathan started making Asian American friends during high school, which prompted him to start exploring his own history and culture. He shared, "During high school I was very interested in my own culture, because my family didn't really teach me like the history—I had to learn about the Khmer Rouge myself." When Nathan arrived at Redwood University, he joined the Cambodian Club, which he considered one of the most impactful experiences he had had in college. He was eager to connect with his Cambodian identity and developed friendships with other Cambodian American students. Combined with his involvement as a peer mentor in the student-led Southeast Asian American retention seminar, Nathan was not only developing his ethnic identity, he was also learning about social issues impacting his community.

Jack entered Coral Tree University determined to connect with his identity and other Asian Americans. He entered as an Asian American Studies major, chose to live in the Asian/Pacific Islander floor in the dorms, joined an Asian-interest fraternity, and became a

member of the Cambodian Club. He was the current culture show coordinator for the Cambodian Club at the time of his interview. Jack discussed his experiences as a member of the Cambodian Club:

> Definitely enjoyed it. I definitely learned to appreciate my people and my heritage, and I was only Asian, you know…Meeting other Cambodians was definitely my first goal…like definitely meeting other people, especially Cambodians, have so much in common with them…And then I love our alumni and even our new members, supporting our club. Them (alumni) being there [at the culture show] is definitely a milestone, because you learn what it is to do hard work, what it is to be Cambodian, and what it is to meet other people. Even now being in Cambodian club allows me to meet a lot of my other good friends from other [colleges and universities].

As a senior, Jack was happy with the opportunities he had at Coral Tree University that allowed him to connect with his ethnic identity and meet others who shared his cultural background.

Having the opportunity to meet and become friends with co-ethnic peers was important for these students' ethnic identity and cultural heritage exploration. Even though their parents still practiced some cultural and religious traditions in the home, students needed to explore these meanings with others of their own generation who were experiencing the same feelings.

Opportunities to solidify their ethnic/Southeast Asian American identities. Some students entered college understanding their Asian American and/or ethnic identity but had not yet developed an awareness of their Southeast Asian American identity. Other students identified themselves as their ethnicity/Southeast Asian American prior to college, but only learned to fully appreciate and understand these identities during college. Culturally validating spaces at Redwood University and Coral Tree University provided opportunities for students to strengthen their pride in and solidify their understanding of their

ethnic/Southeast Asian American identities. In this section, I share the examples of Jasmine, Chloe, and Amelia.

Jasmine was born and raised in a Cambodian American community and her family was still immersed in Khmer cultural traditions, but her parents shielded her from associating with too many Cambodian peers. Jasmine explained, "They just didn't want me to be around the 'bad Cambodians'. So I guess it's not just Cambodians—it's like the Cambodians that have a bad name to them." Fearing that these peers would influence their daughter, they enrolled her in better schools that were away from her community and had very few Cambodian students. Consequently, Jasmine had very few Cambodian American friends. She joined the Cambodian Club during her freshman year at Redwood University because she was determined not to stay a homebody. The club's emphasis on exploring Cambodian culture and traditions was a "really an eye-opening experience" for Jasmine. She explained:

> You learn to appreciate the things that you have more. I've been to Cambodia a couple of times now, but I never really grasped it because I was so young. I didn't really understand. But then I went again in winter, and that was my first year that I was in the club. Before, I wasn't really aware of being there and appreciating being there. So now, I just want to go because there's just so many things I've learned—just the places, temples, and what you can do there. And there are so many pictures that I could have taken because I'd been to all of these places, but I didn't want to take a picture [when I was younger]… And right now, just my club makes me appreciate being Cambodian more.

Jasmine developed a much stronger understanding of Cambodia and Cambodian culture and learned to have a deeper appreciation for her Khmer identity since joining the Cambodian Club. While also serving a social purpose, the club also maintained a focus on learning Khmer history, culture, and traditions. One of their main goals was to spread awareness of Cambodian Americans on the Redwood University campus.

In high school, Chloe considered herself "Chinese-Cambodian, culturally Vietnamese" since both of her parents were raised in Vietnam. She was raised near a large Chinese and Vietnamese community and grew up in a multilingual household. Chloe began to reflect on these identities and why she identified the way she did during college. Through her Asian American Studies courses and her involvements in an Asian American and Pacific Islander political organization and the Southeast Asian American Club at Redwood University, Chloe began redefining her identity. Her first Asian American Studies course, *Asian American Stories*, provided her with an introduction to Asian American Studies. From there, she was motivated to join the AAPI political organization and found the Southeast Asian American Club. Chloe explained, "I really never identified myself as Southeast Asian until coming into college and kind of learning about this idea about being Southeast Asian, through [the Southeast Asian American Club], mostly." There were several culturally validating spaces that contributed to Chloe's identity development, all working in conjunction with each other.

Similar to Chloe, Amelia really began understanding and solidifying her identity during college. During her freshman year at Redwood University, Amelia took an Asian American Communities course with a professor that she considered "amazing" and someone she was really inspired by. Amelia explained how the class was important to her college career:

> I felt like it covered a history that I never learned about in school. So that's why I was so interested in that, and I think it related a lot to what I felt at home, just like the community that was at home in the community that I was starting to build here, too.

Asian American Studies and the organizations she was part of complemented each other really well, and she's learning how to put theory into practice and critically examine her own

identities and communities. Amelia provided a very thoughtful reflection of her experiences and realizations:

> So throughout my life, I feel like I've always identified as Asian American and I felt like I just never knew what it meant to be Asian American. I think I had an interest in the Asian American Studies in my junior year of high school even though I didn't know—I was like this is something I'm interested in but not something I'd major in and just going—I think just going on blogs like Angry Asian Man…there's a bunch. And I think just reading articles and being like, "This is ridiculous. How is this happening today?" So I took that into college—obviously taking my first Asian American Studies class because I'm interested in that and then turning into a minor/major. I think it's really helped me—being involved in these organizations is taking what I learned in the class and using it outside of the class. But also, everything is so relevant with each other, too, in that it's all a part of me finding my own identity here, too, and figuring out what it means to be Asian American and to be—would always say I'm Vietnamese American too, but I don't even know what it means to Vietnamese American. At times, I feel more American than Vietnamese, too. So I didn't even know of the Southeast Asian community until I got here. I didn't know the history and the context of our community here, too. So I just joined SASA so I could learn more… So being a part of both of these organizations really helped me in developing my own set of beliefs and ideals and also just figuring myself out in terms of these categories that I put myself in.

These culturally validating spaces taught Amelia to critically examine for herself what her beliefs and ideals are without accepting information blindly. Through this process, she was solidifying her own identities.

Jasmine, Chloe, and Amelia were given the opportunity to enhance their knowledge about their ethnic and cultural communities during college, equipping them with tools for critical self-examination and self-reflection. Even though all three students entered Redwood University with an established ethnic identity, they quickly learned that it was still an evolving process due to the knowledge they were gaining in these culturally validating environments.

Opportunities to reclaim their ethnic/Southeast Asian American identities. The existence of culturally validating environments also allowed some students to develop pride

in their ethnic identities and reclaim this identity. Prior to college, some students felt anger, hatred, shame, and/or embarrassment about their ethnic identities due to their low-income family status, issues in the ethnic community, disagreement with traditional cultural practices, and being shamed by peers. Ethnicity, alone, did not contribute to these feelings, and students' intersectional identities of socioeconomic status, gender, or other unnamed identities are acknowledged but were not explored in depth in this study. However, having the opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage and develop an ethnic community at their universities helped students develop a new understanding of their ethnic identity. In this section, I share how Vivian, Ethan, Isabel, and Molly were provided with opportunities to reclaim their ethnic identities.

Vivian entered Redwood University clear on her Hmong identity, but she was also grappling with several negative aspects within her ethnic community. These issues produced conflicting emotions about her Hmong identity but also served as a source of motivation to work towards change in her community. Vivian explained:

> For example, like sometimes whenever I go back to very traditional Hmong communities, sometimes I see like a lot of domestic abuse—and a lot of like emotional abuse. That really, really bugs me. But whenever I come back here, it's very different because we're all really open-minded. At first, of course all the freshmen, sometimes they're a little iffy. You have to like kind of train them to like, "Hey you can't say that. Ya know, be careful." And usually they'll be willing to learn. They're really willing to learn, but sometimes when you go back to the community, the elders—they're really hard headed. Their thought is "Oh, I'm an elder I know more. So you can't say anything to me." So my turn now is to go back to my community and teach them not to be like that.

Vivian struggled with the issues of domestic violence in her community and the stubbornness of Hmong elders who ascribed to traditional practices and values. The Hmong Club became an outlet and vessel for inspiring change among the younger Hmong American generations:

> I always take back what I see from my community. I take what I like and I show them what I don't like, and I show them why I don't like it. And we usually have discussions about it—what can we change, and also like with positivity um, how can we learn from that, how can we benefit? And that's what's been making us stronger as a community. So like my hopes for my organization is to develop kind of like my dream community, and it has been working. Of course, not everything goes perfect, but for the most part, it's the area I want to be with. It's the area I want to be surrounded by, and my hopes for them is that if I can teach them what I learned and like if we can teach each other what is beneficial for us, then we can go back and give back to our communities. And it has been working. I have noticed that a lot of members go back to their families and teach them what they learned, and it's been really, really beneficial in that sense.

As president of the club, Vivian described the Hmong Club as an opportunity for her to work towards her "dream community" for Hmong Americans. She recognized that change needed to start with the younger generation, and we can see from Vivian's example that students have been inspired to bring this knowledge back to their families and home communities. The Hmong Club served a larger purpose beyond being a social space—Hmong American students at Redwood University used this space to discuss and enact change within their ethnic community. I elaborate on the value of culturally validating spaces as vehicles for social change later in this chapter. For Vivian, the promise of the Hmong Club and the progressive views of the younger generation of Hmong Americans allowed her to develop a more positive outlook for the future of the Hmong American community. She envisioned and was working towards a shifting Hmong American culture, reclaiming pride in her Hmong American identity in the process.

Even though Ethan entered Redwood University with an in-depth knowledge of the struggles faced by the Southeast Asian American community due to his experiences growing up in Sacramento, Ethan developed an understanding that he was supposed to have a mother and a father in his Vietnamese household. He shared:

> It was weird, because actually growing up, I kind of disliked being Vietnamese. Because I felt like being Vietnamese, you're supposed to have a father and a mother growing up, so then I felt that by being raised by a single parent, that I'm not Vietnamese kinda…Just from my views and then also from gatherings—going to family gatherings or like my mom's coworkers' gatherings and parties—I felt kind of out of place of not having the opportunity to embrace my culture and heritage as much.

Ethan's family was unlike other "traditional" Vietnamese families he saw in his community. Being raised by a single mother and not having any extended family in the United States, Ethan's childhood experience with Vietnamese cultural practices and traditions was limited. He explained:

> It's still surprising for me, like Tet New Year—Lunar New Year—my mom would just cook one dish or something whereas other families, they go all out inviting other families from afar. But then my Tet was just my brothers and my mom. That's it, ya know. So it's still kind of surprising for me today to see large gatherings on this sacred holiday.

Due to this understanding, he struggled with his Vietnamese identity because his experiences were unlike other Vietnamese families in his community. The culturally validating environments at Redwood University helped Ethan to heal, come to terms with, and reclaim his ethnic identity. He mentioned the process of "healing" and becoming "empowered" five different times during his interview. The Asian American Studies department, the library's Southeast Asian archives, and Ethan's involvement in the Southeast Asian Club were important spaces for his academic, social, and emotional development. He shared:

> With my experience being a first-generation student, having culturally relevant material is important for the transition of students like myself—coming from a first-generation background and coming from a very traumatizing immigrant experience…Some of the classes that I've taken so far have opened my mind and allowed me to heal and embrace my heritage a little bit more, like the Vietnamese American Experience. I think there's only like one class that was relatable to my experience, and there's another class that recently came back and that's the Southeast Asian American Experience, yea. So I guess those classes are very important to continuing the dialogue with the refugee experience especially when parents have instilled this hope for their children to continue education so they can speak about

> their struggles and continuing to reflect on their past and give back to their community.

These spaces allowed Ethan to build a broader understanding of Vietnamese American families, culture, history, and experiences.

When her family moved from a dense Cambodian community in Long Beach to a community in the Bay Area of California for her dad's work, Isabel felt a sense of loss about her ethnic identity. Even though it was a racially diverse community, there were very few Khmer communities nearby and she felt her family was becoming more "Americanized." Isabel explained:

> I think as we've gotten older, [my parents have] become more Americanized. They're doing more American-related stuff, but it's just that we don't practice Cambodian tradition as much anymore. We used to go to Cambodian New Year's every year, but now, it's just—I mean, we don't really want to go through the hassle of driving up to Stockton, yea. And I think, I lost a lot of my identity as a Cambodian because I just stopped speaking it and I think, language is a really important bridge in understanding your culture—just because I feel like it has certain ideas embedded within it that allows you to see things differently. And so, I feel like I didn't really start claiming that as my identity until I came here and I joined the – the [Cambodian Club] here… I went to a Cambodian Club conference. It was just so— it's very invigorating. I feel just so excited to share this heritage with each other…

The Cambodian Club at Coral Tree University became a space for Isabel to explore the identity that she felt she lost while growing up. She delved into this exploration with the friends that she made, the culture she was learning, and even attended a state-wide Cambodian Club conference to expand her knowledge. Isabel described the impact her involvement in the club has had on her:

> For me, it was a renewed sense of self. This is a part of me that I've been trying to connect to, and even though the resources we have here are very little, it has definitely allowed me to connect to it in some ways. And after college, I actually really want to be involved with some of the Cambodian communities up in the Bay Area. So, it has had a positive influence.

Despite the limited resources, the Cambodian Club offered Isabel a space to interact with Khmer peers, learn about her culture, and reclaim her ethnic identity.

Coming from an impoverished family and community, Molly had lived through issues of domestic violence, drug abuse, and incarceration within her family. In addition to this, Molly developed a critical perspective on Hmong cultural views and traditions, and she was eager to leave the community for college. Very few Hmong American youth in her community left for college, but she was determined to pave a more successful path for herself. Soon after arriving at Redwood University, Molly realized that she needed a Hmong American community; she needed the familiarity. Molly shared:

> My initial point of leaving for college was that I should be away from people— from Hmong students, the Hmong community, and I think just coming here makes me yearn for it more. And so that helped me really start [the Hmong Club].

Starting the Hmong Club with her friend helped change Molly's perceptions about her peers, her community, and her culture. She developed a much more positive view of her identity:

> [The Hmong Club] helps me come to terms with myself as a Hmong person. In terms of, like, I came from a place of hatred for the community, hatred for my identity, and now I'm more accepting and understanding about it. And then just from that, it also helped me – I always had this ongoing joke of, like, I have no Hmong friends, but now I feel like I have tons of Hmong friends. It's just been very interesting, and so it's also helped me build friendships with people outside of [Redwood University].

Without this opportunity to form a Hmong Club at Redwood University, it was unclear whether Molly would have received other opportunities to develop a more positive perception of her Hmong American identity and the Hmong American community.

These students who learned to reclaim their ethnic and Southeast Asian American identities during college needed and received opportunities to meet co-ethnic peers who held similar values, ideals, and a desire to find the positive aspects of their ethnic community. With these culturally validating opportunities, students were exposed to peers and

experiences that allowed them to heal from their previous notions about their community. What is important to note about all of these students experiences exploring, developing, solidifying, and reclaiming their ethnic and Southeast Asian American identities is that these identities do not exist in isolation. It was clear from students' experiences that other intersectional identities also played a role in how and why students' developed certain attitudes about their ethnic identities both before and during college, but a more in-depth analyses of those influences was beyond the scope of this study.

Opening Lines of Communication with Parents

The knowledge they gained from Asian American Studies courses and their ethnic clubs and organizations prompted several students to begin communicating with their parents about their family history, cultural practices, and campus activities—something many of the students never thought to do in their youth.

Ethan, Isabel, and Jasmine's involvements in their ethnic clubs ignited a desire to share their experiences with their parents. Since the Cambodian Club was such a fulfilling and influential aspect of Isabel's college experience, she developed a renewed interest in learning about her family's history. Isabel explained:

> I would really love to be involved with the Cambodian community. It's one of the goals I really look forward to, and I think, without this experience, that interest would have just ceased to exist…And I feel like this identity is becoming more important, and it's growing, and I definitely want to like– when I go back home, I just would want to sit down with mom and dad, and just talk about it just because it's – I – it's something I lost that I want to gain it back.

Similarly, Ethan communicated with his mother about his various campus organizations and involvements. He and his mother have always had a fairly communicative relationship about their family's immigration history, so discussing his campus involvements was a way of illustrating that he valued, respected, and worked to honor her experiences. Jasmine's role as

the Culture Show coordinator helped her develop an even stronger connection with her parents. They even offered their services to assist her. Jasmine explained:

> So it's like they don't really get to see me that often, but they know that I'm doing good things right now for my club. My dad, he's like really supportive. He's like, "You need funds? Let's go and talk to all my friends." So he has a bunch of those [Culture Show] fliers at home. So he's like really supportive of that.

College was the first time that many of these students were offered the opportunity to interact with their cultural identity and heritage in an educational setting, so this opened new lines of communication with their parents that they did not previously have.

Amelia and Tom were inspired to share their experiences in their Asian American Studies courses with their parents. Amelia enrolled in the Vietnamese American Experience course at Redwood University which helped her develop a stronger relationship with her parents:

> We're supposed to do oral history projects, so I went home and interviewed my dad and so from there, he was able to get more of a glimpse of what I was doing here in college…but also just taking that class, I call home just a little bit more often to ask him, "Oh do you remember when this happened?" and he's like, "Yea, I remember when this happened and this is what I thought of it" and everything. So I think it's me making that connection between what I'm learning in class and bringing it back to the family too.

These experiences were beneficial to both Amelia and her parents, because they were offered a more in-depth view of her courses and she learned to make personal connections with the course material. This course ignited Amelia's interest in Asian American Studies, and she declared the additional major during her second year at Redwood University. Tom was a pre-med student at Coral Tree University who focused his efforts on his science courses and only enrolled in *Asian American Families* to fulfill a general education requirement. The course took him by surprise, and he ended up loving the literature that was assigned. The readings

opened his mind to a lot of his own experiences. After reading *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* by Amy Chua, Tom had a revelation about his own family:

> I love that book. I like to think of myself as the older daughter, and my younger brother as the younger daughter. My mom is having so many issues with dealing with my younger brother. She's thinking all these things that worked with me will work with him, and it's not at all. We are very similar, but there are some crucial differences. I bought her that book.

This was the first time Tom saw his life reflected in the academic curriculum and learned the value of having these kinds of opportunities. Not only did this course help Tom connect with his mother about their own family, it also helped him learn the value of ethnic studies courses. He admitted, "If you asked me last year, I probably would have said it's more important for people to take genetics in order to understand evolution." Tom admitted that he hoped his schedule allowed him to take more Asian American Studies classes in the future.

The culturally validating environments of Asian American Studies courses and ethnic clubs helped students bridge their worlds of home, family, and college. These culturally relevant experiences allowed an avenue for students to include their parents in their education, something their parents appeared to be eager to be part of.

Supporting Mentoring Relationships

These culturally validating spaces also offered opportunities for students develop mentoring relationships with faculty, staff, teaching assistants, and most especially their peers. These mentoring relationships became an important part of several students' college experience—academically, socially, and emotionally. These mentors served as cultural brokers who guided students through difficult situations, introduced them to campus and community resources, encouraged involvement in campus activities, and helped them navigate the higher education terrain.

Developing mentoring relationships with faculty. Asian American Studies departments provided sites for developing mentoring relationships with faculty and teaching assistants. As an Asian American Studies major at Coral Tree University, Jack had interacted and taken courses with almost all of the faculty in the department. He explained why his experiences in this department were so different from others, "I really do like and enjoy and talk to the professors when I have a chance to see them…They definitely remember us—which is a positive, but a lot different from other faculties who don't remember us at all." Kim spoke about her experiences with both Southeast Asian American faculty and teaching assistants from her Asian American Studies courses:

> I think I know a couple, like Professor Vu, and a lot of grad students who taught classes…I'll clump them together. It's been really interesting, because it's been very nurturing and mentoring in a very academic sense, talking about different issues that I face in a very academic lens—like why I feel like this because of this concept or this theory…I've had a couple of TAs that have been really interesting mentor figures. I had one TA who decided to leave UCSB to become an organizer—I thought that was so impressive because no one does that. He was a really interesting figure, because in class, we could talk about the class material but also other things. So when he said he was going to leave I was like, "Oh my god I need to talk to you more!" So we traded emails and added me on Facebook and we made plans to get coffee.

In these mentoring relationships, students were able to talk through and apply a theoretical lens to their own experiences. Also, as we see between the relationship that developed between Kim and her teaching assistant, students saw potential for their own futures through their mentors' experiences. Unlike Jack and Kim, many other students who discussed the role of faculty were more likely to speak about faculty as encouraging and inspiring role models, but who were less likely to be as heavily involved as staff mentors.

Developing mentoring relationships with staff members. Through their involvement in campus cultural centers, sites of employment, and participation in campus outreach and retention centers, some students developed mentoring relationships with

campus staff members. Chloe, Ethan, and Molly all identified the Director of the campus outreach and retention center at Redwood University as an important mentor figure in their educational experience. Not only did the center serve as an important space for programming, resources, study space, and supplies, these students also relied on Dr. D as well-respected mentor. Chloe expressed, "Dr. D is amazing. She does a lot." Ethan credited Dr. D for providing him with academic support and helping him plan his future. He said:

> Dr. D and her support…reminding me to be above the minimum GPA or just like setting goals for me—like long-term and short-term goals to be academically successful and being able to do the things I want to do in terms of community involvement and stuff…She has helped me through being a professional individual and also being an academically successful student as well.

Dr. D and her work through the student outreach and retention center served as important and essential components of many students' success. Dr. D was not Southeast Asian American, but a Latina woman. Students at Coral Tree University did not have a similar space or staff member that was as inclusive of the services that were offered at this outreach and retention center at Redwood University. Redwood University's library also had a special archive dedicated to Southeast Asian Americans, and was headed by an archivist who also taught in the Asian American Studies Department—Professor Truong. Professor Truong and the archive were also important sources of support for Ethan and other students at Redwood University. Kim felt fortunate that her Southeast Asian American staff mentors reached out to her and offered her their mentorship. She explained:

> In terms of staff, I'm just gonna consider him Southeast Asian—he's Filipino, but he's the [residence hall] director so he's technically my boss. It's just really nice to talk to him. I've talked to him about [my seminar] and we've gone out to breakfast together and he knows about my own personal problems and he knows I don't have time to eat a lot so he always brings food to our meetings. I met the housing director who's also Vietnamese, which is I think is super impressive because it's like, "Whoa, you're in a really high up student affairs position and you're not white and you're a woman," and she's from Orange County too!...And so for the two of them I've gotten

> really interesting mentor relationships with them because I didn't ask for them or start them and they kind of initiated it themselves…It was something I didn't ask for, but it just happened, and I'm really glad it did.

What was notable, as Kim mentioned, was that these Southeast Asian American staff members were the ones who reached out and offered their mentorship to Kim. This may be due to the fact that these staff members understood the importance of culturally relevant mentorship for Southeast Asian American students. These became really important relationships for Kim to share about her personal, academic, and professional struggles while also receiving guidance about her future. These staff members were critical cultural brokers who provided students with resources, academic support, emotional support, and guidance for their futures. However, these students who formed mentoring relationships were highly involved and very active in campus activities, which allowed them to have frequent interactions with staff members. As well, these staff members were in roles that were committed to supporting student success. These findings highlight the important role that staff members can play in students' experiences.

Developing and initiating mentoring relationships with peers. Peers were critical to many students' persistence in their university. They served as informal counselors to friends who were too nervous, intimidated, embarrassed, or uneasy about approaching counselors at their university. They provided students with academic and emotional counseling. In addition to this, peers encouraged involvement in clubs and organizations, to volunteer in local communities, and inspired each other to work towards social change. Although there were many more students who relied on or served as peer mentors, in this section, I share the examples of Amelia, Nathan, Ethan, and Kim.

Amelia, Ethan, and Nathan found peer mentors in their first two years of college who helped them shape positive college experiences. They were introduced to new campus resources and organizations, and they relied on their mentors for academic and emotional advice. Ethan's connection with a student regent led to his introduction with the student outreach and retention center and Dr. D. As discussed in prior sections, this center and Dr. D became integral components of his college experience and his preparations for the future. Ethan shared:

> I found out about [the student outreach and retention center] through my involvement with the student regent at the time. Yea. So then, um, by being involved with the student regent at the time he was able to open different opportunities for me and my other peers at the time to become involved in multiple campus opportunities sand community opportunities.

As a result of their mentorship, Ethan became part of several organizations, as well as starting the Southeast Asian Club and developed a Southeast Asian American student seminar through the outreach and retention center. Amelia found a mentor after joining an Asian American student organization during her freshman year. This mentor was also a history major like Amelia and took her under her wings. She shared:

> But she was a history major and she was a fourth year last year and so she really helped me through my first year in terms of academics and everything and making sure that I was okay here. She also helped kind of push me into minoring in Asian American Studies at first and so by the end of that year, I was already a minor in Asian American Studies. She was just there and we just spent a lot of time together creating programs. One of the best memories I have of my first year is working with a lot of student leaders in creating this immigration reform rally, so we worked with a lot of organizations in the [cultural center] and just outside groups, too. It was just a really good experience, and it was a great time to bond with my mentor but also meet other people, and that committee and that rally helped to restart the Dreams Group here, too.

Not only did Amelia's mentor check in on her mental health and provide her with academic support, she also introduced her to the social justice and activism community at Redwood

University. These experiences with her mentor during her first year that helped shape the trajectory of her college experiences.

Nathan's peer mentors were critical in supporting his persistence after major academic struggles that resulted in having to switch majors and career paths. He struggled through his biology courses during his freshman year and failed his first class during his second year. Nathan shared, "I was very depressed during that time. And I had to switch my major. I felt really like ... lost. I didn't know what to do with my life." He turned to his family, specifically his aunt and his brother, for advice on choosing a new major (business), and his girlfriend encouraged him towards the business economics route. However, he relied on his friends in the Cambodian Club for emotional support; they were the first people he turned to when he learned he had to switch majors. Nathan had developed a brother-sister bond with one friend who was a senior in the Cambodian Club and credited her mentorship and encouragement as one of the main reasons he survived this stressful period. He said, "She was like my older sister…So she helped me through that." Initially, Nathan considered giving up on college, but knew that was an unrealistic notion because he did not want to disappoint his parents. When asked why he chose not to seek help from professional counselors at Redwood University, he replied:

> I thought I wasn't comfortable going to the academic counselors until after I decided what I wanted to do…I only went to the academic counselors after I figured out, "Okay, I'm gonna be Bus-Econ," but I never consulted them to help me decide which path I should choose…I guess I felt like they wouldn't help me. I didn't feel like I could be helped by them…I guess, they might, like, make fun of me or something.

Nathan's example illustrates several important experiences for students. Having mentors to turn to during these critical times are crucial for students' academic success and emotional health. Unfortunately, Nathan had either developed a stigma or fear about turning to

professional counselors, or he was unsure of what their roles were as counselors. Nathan seemed to think he needed to have a clear direction of his major and career path before being able to seek help. This is a perception that needs to change in order for students to seek proper academic counseling.

Students like Ethan and Kim had their own peer mentors, but they also served as mentors to several other Southeast Asian American students at their universities. Several students named Ethan and Kim as mentors in their interviews, because they were highly involved leaders in the student community. Both were students who benefited from having their own mentors (adult and peer mentors), and they were paying it forward to help students who were similar to themselves. As mentioned previously, Ethan started the Southeast Asian Club, an outreach program for high school students, and a seminar aimed at supporting the retention of Southeast Asian American freshmen and transfer students. He also encouraged many of his peers to become involved in local community organizations. Kim organized an overnight high school outreach program for Vietnamese American students from her alma mater. Students who had a lot of mentorship and support were able to inspire many others to follow suit.

Supporting Students' Sense of Belonging

Culturally validating environments, primarily the ethnic clubs and organizations, also allowed students to feel a sense of belonging at their university. Students developed a "home away from home." For some students, these were the only spaces on campus where students felt accepted, and many students considered their clubs a second family. Thirteen of the twenty-four students credited these culturally validating spaces as contributing to their sense of belonging at their university. Having access to culturally similar students was important,

and for some, it was necessary for their emotional health. In this section, I share the voices of Jeff, Charlie, Vivian, Kim, and Ethan.

Jeff struggled in his first few months of college, because he felt isolated and marginalized in the dorms. His dorm mates did not reciprocate the efforts Jeff put into forming friendships with the people in his hall, and he felt it was because everyone was white except for him and his roommates, who were high school friends. A friend introduced him to the Vietnamese Club at Coral Tree University, and Jeff saw his college experience changing after attending the first meeting. He immediately felt a sense of belonging. He shared:

> You make a lot of friends in [the Vietnamese Club] because you are open with so many people and you can interact with each other – like, [the Vietnamese Club] is a family, so everyone has open arms. They aren't rejecting or anything. That is what I felt was most great about [the Vietnamese Club], that it was like a family, a family away from home, you know.

The club turned Jeff's college experience around and helped him gain more confidence by taking on leadership positions in the club.

Since Charlie did not know of any other Lao American students and there was no Lao Club at Redwood University, Charlie was encouraged by a friend to join the Hmong Club. Despite the differences in language and culture, Charlie found enough commonalities with the club members that he felt a sense of belonging in the space. Charlie shared:

> There's not a Lao club, unfortunately… I joined [the Hmong Club] and I felt so family-oriented. It was like the second family…They were very welcoming. Even though we didn't speak the same language, we knew, there was some, we found similarities like in food and like culture, and then that, I think I felt very at home, very family. So they're very supportive, too, and they do study groups.

Charlie also started taking on leadership positions in the organization. Having the connection with another Southeast Asian American student group fostered a sense of family and belonging for Charlie since he knew no other Lao students at the university. This was

important because Charlie longed to make connections with other students who understood his background. As one of the founders of the Hmong Club, Vivian knew she needed a Hmong community at Redwood University. When asked why she felt as though she belonged at Redwood University, she expressed:

> I just feel like I belong here just because my org. If it wasn't for this organization, I'd feel like I don't belong here…They give me this feeling as if I'm at home. It's nice. It's kinda like we grew up with another. And like I mentioned earlier, it's like a nice way for me to start like my dream community, where it's like this is what the community should be…Like we kinda teach each other what we need to know and we learn that way, and we're all really tolerant and open-minded. So...That's why I feel comfortable here. If not, then I probably wouldn't want to be here. Yea, if we didn't create one, I mean I would still be here, but I wouldn't feel as wanted here.

These culturally validating spaces provided students with the safe space that they did not feel in other parts of their campus.

Kim shared that she would have transferred out of the university without the availability of culturally validating environments. To combat the feelings of "uncomfortableness" that she felt in the general spaces at Coral Tree University, Kim was the president of the Vietnamese Club, a mentor coordinator for the Asian American and Pacific Islander floor of the residence halls, involved at the campus cultural center, and a member of the Asian American and Pacific Islander student political group. She shared:

> It's a lot of AAPI, student affairs, multicultural, ethnic stuff that I do mostly. These definitely made me a feel a little sense of family and belonging, cause you know all of these organizations tried to create that environment where everyone is really comfortable with each other. And I think it's mainly if I didn't have these organizations, I probably would have transferred out. I think I said this before, but I didn't have a good orientation experience, and so since I didn't have a good orientation experience and I wasn't connected to my hall my first year, and I didn't really feel connected to the people in m major as well—being in a very white-dominated, privileged major—that I probably would have left. So these organizations have contributed to why I'm still here. 'Cause it's where I can air out my grievances and talk and feel like I'm not saying things where people would be like, "Why do you care about that?" ya know. 'Cause it's people who relate and everything.

Culturally validating environments serve as an important counter-space to students' perceptions of a negative campus racial climate. As several students stated, these spaces were crucial to their sense of belonging and their overall well-being at their universities.

When culturally validating spaces were difficult to find or did not exist, some students took the initiative to create their own spaces. Ethan shared why and how he organized the Southeast Asian Club at Redwood University:

> I think that by creating, when I created the space with my friends in terms of the [the Southeast Asian Club], that was like the point of creating space for my belonging on campus. I guess through that space allowed me to find a second family without Southeast Asian folks and individuals that participated in the Southeast Asian organizing stage. I guess, at first, it was hard for me to find a second family at [Redwood University] because there wasn't a lot of Southeast Asian organizing space, and so I created it with other individuals that shared the same vision. I guess over time, through that space, allowed me to find a family with other SEA folks and also with the Archives being very essential to my learning experience, and also the Southeast Asian staff that are there at the university. Yea. So like, I didn't find that belonging until creating a space like that on campus.

Carving out his own space of belonging served to extend Ethan's own network of Southeast Asian American students, staff, and faculty members, as well as gaining access to resources across campus. Not only did this space support Ethan's sense of belonging, it created culturally validating spaces for all Southeast Asian American students at Redwood University to benefit from.

Allowing Students to Develop Awareness of and Take Action on Social Issues

Culturally validating spaces also cultivated a sense of civic engagement among students. Through the knowledge they gained in their Asian American Studies courses, the cultural centers, outreach and retention centers, and their ethnic clubs and organizations, students became invested in issue surrounding the campus community, the local community, and their ethnic community. Students were also learning about larger national movements for

social justice. These experiences also played a role in influencing some students' graduate and career aspirations. Learning was not confined to formal classrooms. Ethnic studies courses provided students with a vocabulary and theoretical lenses to examine social issues, but most students were actively discussing and working on these issues through a grassroots approach in their organizations. Eleven of the twenty-four students discussed how their involvement in these spaces cultivated their sense of civic engagement. In this section, I share the stories of Amelia, Molly, and Chloe.

Amelia and Molly came into college with aspirations to work with and give back to their community; for Chloe, college opened her eyes to the issues facing the Southeast Asian American community. Through their involvements in several ethnic clubs and community organizations, some that they were all in together, Amelia, Molly, and Chloe balanced their academic commitments with numerous service commitments. Amelia's Asian American Studies courses and her involvements in the Asian American and Pacific Islander and Southeast Asian American student organizations helped shape her aspirations to work with the Southeast Asian American community. She said, "I want to plan programs around our community and around furthering and fostering the growth in our community too." Similarly, Molly's was introduced to a desirable career option through her work at a local non-profit servicing the Asian American community. She expressed, "Because it's a very service-based non-profit, that really prompted me to want to pursue organizing." Molly learned that she could blend her aspirations for law with community organizing. Once she learned about the state of Southeast Asian American communities, Chloe committed herself to several campus organizations to support her community. She first began as a mentor in a high school

outreach program that Ethan developed, and was currently the co-coordinator of the program. Chloe discussed how she came to learn about Southeast Asian American issues:

> I think that's kind of where my interest in this idea of helping students pursue education kind of came from. I think I really saw the connection in terms of, "What I can do to help these students?" and, "How can I make these students' lives better? I have the resources. I have the time. What can I do to help these students?" And that's kind of where I built this interest in that…I don't think I ever cared for this until being in [the ethnic clubs] world and realizing the importance of—pursuing higher education is a problem in the Southeast Asian community. That's the number one problem, I feel like. It's really important. And being involved with [the Southeast Asian club] made me realize, "You know what? On this campus there isn't a lot of Southeast Asian students."…And I think definitely could be increased. We need to pursue the high schools, right? Helping from there, creating this opportunity for them. And I really recognize that. And I think being around a lot of people on this campus that are doing that work makes me really happy. Which is why I'm really happy you're doing this sort of work as well, because I think it's really, really, really important.

After developing this awareness, Chloe dove into community work and taking on leadership positions in her organizations. She admitted that she was struggling to balance these commitments with her computer science classes, but she was determined to continue supporting the Southeast Asian American student community. Many students were in a similar situation as Chloe, realizing that community work was essential to their identity, even if it meant sacrificing perfect grades. These culturally validating spaces were equipping students with knowledge, inspiring action, and empowering Southeast Asian American students to support their communities.

Chapter Summary

To summarize, the availability of culturally validating environments: 1) supported students' ethnic identity development, 2) opened lines of communication with parents, 3) allowed for mentoring relationships to develop, 4) supported students' sense of belonging, and 5) helped students develop an awareness of and take action on social issues. These

culturally validating environments were found in Asian American Studies courses, ethnic clubs and organizations, the campus outreach and retention center at Redwood University, campus cultural centers, and the people that were associated with these spaces. These environments were an important and necessary aspect of Southeast Asian American students' experiences at their university. Without these spaces, many students may have lacked opportunities to develop or come to terms with their ethnic identities, lacked opportunities to develop crucial mentoring relationships, lacked a sense of belonging at their university, or lacked opportunities to become social change agents. Within these larger institutions, these culturally validating spaces are small pockets of reprieve and safety from a campus environment that does not fully serve their academic, social, and emotional needs. What was most notable was that many of these spaces were student created or student led, often with little institutional support. Institutions need to understand the value of culturally validating environments for underrepresented student groups and invest more institutional support into helping students create and maintain these spaces, since we see how vital they are to Southeast Asian American students' persistence in the university.

Chapter 9

Discussion

This study examined the pathways that led Southeast Asian American students to academically rigorous universities in addition to examining their experiences in the universities. By examining the individual, social, and institutional influences on their educational experiences, this study helped to understand the factors that affected student persistence and retention.

Summary of Findings

This section provides a brief summary of findings from each chapter to guide the rest of the discussion in this concluding chapter.

Students' pathways to the research university. The Southeast Asian American students in this study all had different pathways into the research university, but one finding was true for all of the students—they were aware that the University of California schools were prestigious. This was important to the students and their parents, especially because many of these students were among the first in their families to attend these prestigious universities.

Supports and challenges. Students gained educational and emotional support from high school outreach programs, family members, mentors, peers, their involvements in campus clubs and organizations, and campus resource centers. On the other hand, a lack of support during the college application process, their own mental roadblocks, other people, academics, finances, and feelings of loneliness, isolation, and marginalization caused difficulties on students' educational pathways. Of course, these were not the only supports and difficulties that students faced, but these were major themes that arose across students'

experiences. In addition to this, it is important to note that these supports and challenges often did not work in isolation, but were overlapped with other issues.

Campus racial climate. The findings suggested that Southeast Asian American students at both Coral Tree University and Redwood University experienced a negative campus racial climate. Not only did the majority of students consider there to be an insufficient number of Southeast Asian American students, there was also an insufficient number of culturally familiar faculty, staff, and administrators at both universities. In addition to this, 17 of the 24 students had experienced incidents of racism or racial microaggressions at their universities; for students at Coral Tree University, this appeared to be a more regular occurrence in the nearby community where the majority of students resided.

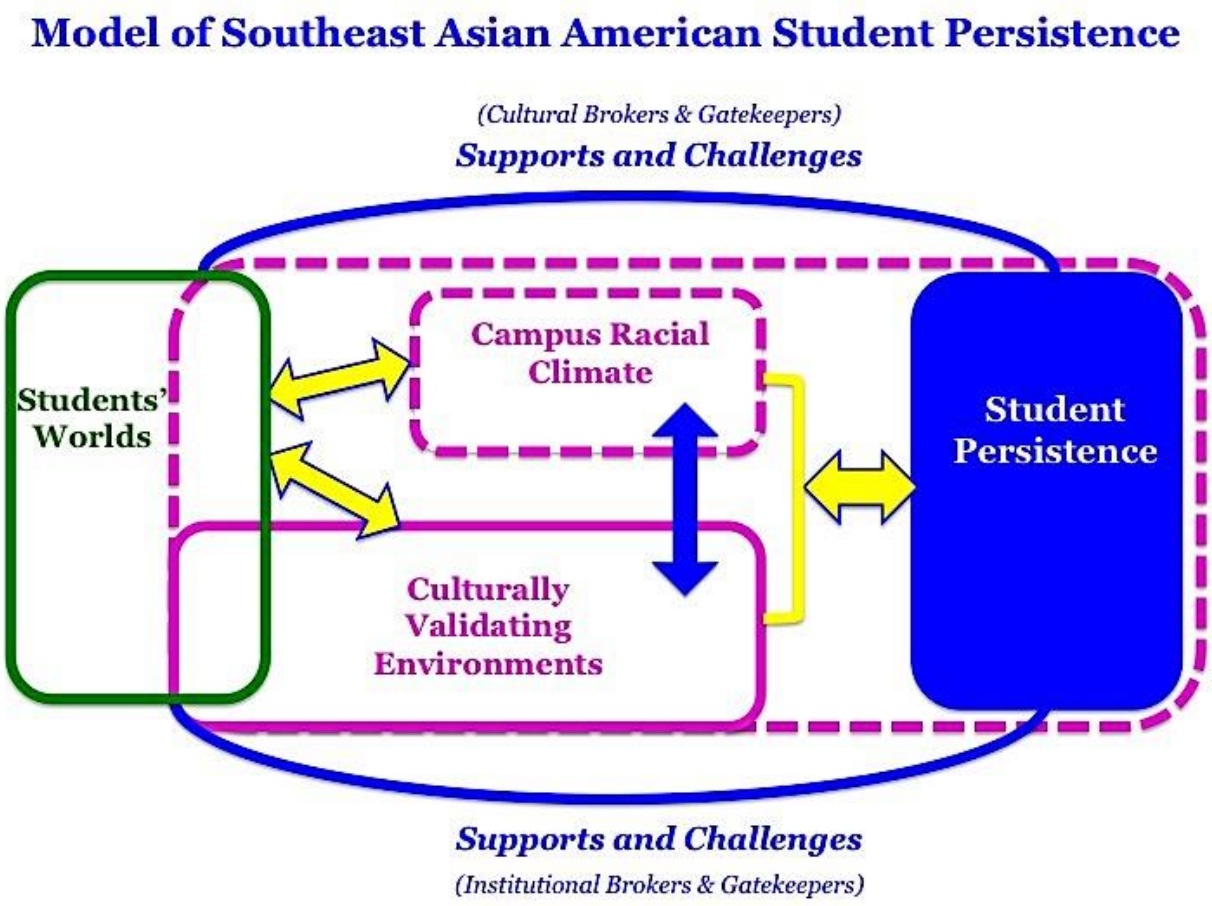
Culturally validating environments bridging students' worlds. Spaces such as the Asian American Studies Department, ethnic clubs and organizations, the campus outreach and retention center, campus cultural centers, and the people within these spaces helped students bridge their worlds by: 1) supporting students' ethnic identity development, 2) opening lines of communication with parents, 3) developing mentoring relationships, 4) supporting students' sense of belonging, and 5) helping students develop an awareness of or take action on social issues.

Discussion

Moving beyond Tinto's (1975) social integrationist perspectives, Tierney (1992), Hurtado (1992), Kuh and Love (2000), Carter (2006), and several others scholars argued the need to examine the role of institutional environments and institutional accountability in student persistence and retention. By using a combination of the Bridging Multiple Worlds

Model (Cooper et al., 2002; Cooper, 2011), the cultural validation frameworks (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus et al., 2013; Rendón, 1994), and campus racial climate frameworks (Hurtado et al., 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009), I was able to gain an in-depth look at the individual, social, and institutional components impacting Southeast Asian American students' persistence in the university. Drawing from the findings discussed in the last four chapters, I developed a new model of Southeast Asian American university student persistence illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Model of Southeast Asian American University Student Persistence



This model illustrates some of the individual, social, and institutional components that played a role in Southeast Asian American university students' persistence. The green box represents students' main worlds; some of the main worlds identified by students in this study included their ethnic/cultural identity, family, friends, college, clubs/organizations, extended family, and housemates in college. The dashed pink line encompasses the university, which includes the campus racial climate and culturally validating environments. The campus racial climate box is also dashed to denote that it is representative of the entire university setting. As the model indicates, some of students' main worlds were the university itself and components within the university (e.g. friends, clubs/organizations, housemates, etc.). I acknowledge that this model does not explicitly address the academic, financial, and larger societal influences on students' persistence due to the frameworks chosen to guide this study, but these topics developed organically in students' surveys and interviews about their experiences. Framed by the Bridging Multiple Worlds Model (Cooper et al., 2002; Cooper, 2011), Southeast Asian American students entered the university with worlds that were important to them and their identity, and they developed additional worlds in the university. These worlds and identities interacted with culturally validating environments on both campuses, which included the people associated with these spaces. It must be emphasized that the students, themselves, developed some of the culturally validating spaces in their universities after identifying a void in institutional support. Students' worlds and identities also interacted with the campus racial climate, which I concluded to be negative for Southeast Asian American students at both universities. The blue arrow connecting campus racial climate and culturally validating environments is used to indicate how culturally validating environments served to counter students' negative campus climate experiences;

students sought out these spaces to prevent negative campus racial climate experiences and/or students sought ought these spaces as a result of negative campus racial climate experiences. Therefore, the interactions between students' worlds, the campus racial climate, and culturally validating environments all worked to influence their decisions to persist in the university. The blue lines indicate the individual cultural brokers and gatekeepers (within and outside of the university) and the institutional brokers and gatekeepers who also played a role in student persistence. Overall, this model identifies and illustrates the relationship between Southeast Asian American students' identities/worlds and the major social and institutional factors that support and/or challenge their persistence. By examining students' experiences through this model, we acknowledge students' sense of agency in seeking out sources of support/cultural brokers (to counter a negative campus racial climate or for the challenges that arise along their pathway), but we also acknowledge students' agency in developing sources of support/becoming cultural brokers for their fellow students (developing outreach/retention programs or creating culturally validating spaces).

Previous work on student retention and departure argued for institutions to enact more culturally responsive methods for supporting minoritized student retention and to understand that students' cultural identities are central to their experiences (e.g. Kuh & Love, 2000; McNairy, 1996; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Tierney, 2000). However, much of this work derived from examinations of predominantly white institutions (PWIs), and no other study has examined how Southeast Asian American university students experience the campus racial climate in relation to their cultural identities. In addition to this, the intentional and unique design of this study comparing two academically rigorous, but demographically different, institutions in the same university system yielded surprising and important results

for thinking about student demographics, campus racial climate, and institutional responsibility.

As described in Chapter 4, Coral Tree University had a white student population of 41% and an Asian/Pacific Islander (API) student population of 25%. Redwood University had a white student population of 14% and an Asian/Pacific Islander student population of 42%. Coral Tree University can be described as a traditionally white institution (TWI) surrounded by predominantly white communities, and Redwood University's cultural milieu reflected the high percentage of API students and surrounding Asian American ethnic enclaves. Despite these contrasting student demographics and distinct environments, the campus racial climate was determined to be negative at both institutions when analyzed according to Yosso and colleagues' (2009) outline of a positive campus racial climate. Merely having the representation of API students in high numbers was not enough for Southeast Asian American students to experience a positive campus racial climate at Redwood University. Students were acutely aware that the majority of API students at Redwood University were of East Asian descent, and the vast majority of the students (83%) did not consider there to be a sufficient number of Southeast Asian American students at their university. Only 7% of the students from Redwood University felt that their Southeast Asian American identities were valued at their university, and Jasmine and Nathan shared that their identities were only valued in culturally validating spaces (e.g., ethnic student clubs and campus cultural centers). Additionally, eight of the twelve students from Redwood University reported experiencing incidents of racism and/or racial microaggressions. These findings yield important implications for institutions to consider the impact of aggregated racial group data and how having a high percentage of API students was not enough to create

a positive campus racial climate for Southeast Asian American students. A positive campus racial climate includes having students, faculty, and administrators of color, curriculum that reflects students' histories and experiences, programs that support the recruitment, retention and graduation of students of color, and an institutional commitment to diversity (Yosso et al., 2009). This study lends to the argument that institutions need to actively and continuously assess their efforts in developing an inclusive and equitable campus environment for all students, even if the numbers may not suggest a need.

In these next few sections, I further discuss how this study supports and extends the literature on Southeast Asian American student persistence.

The critical nature of the first year. The first year at their university was a difficult transition for many of the students, to the point where 11 of the 24 students considered leaving the university during their first year. According to the American College Testing Program (2012), as discussed by Braxton and colleagues (2014), 45% of students enrolled in two-year colleges and 28% of first-year students enrolled at four-year colleges or universities leave at the end of their first year, and these figures remain consistent. Therefore, understanding first-year students' challenges remains an important problem in higher education. These Southeast Asian American students struggled with many transition issues that all students tend to face during their first year, such as: adjusting to university-level courses, homesickness, and having to make new friends. However, these students also faced challenges that were related to their Southeast Asian American identity: living in a community that contained little cultural familiarity, the struggle of navigating higher education as a first-generation college student, learning to negotiate their relationships with their families and communities with their academic obligations, struggling to remain

connected with their ethnic and cultural identities, battling feelings of marginalization from other students, and fearing how their friends and family back home perceive of their identity as a university student. These were only some of the issues that caused difficulties for these Southeast Asian American students and similar to the transitionary issues that Cambodian American students in Chhuon and Hudley's (2008) study and Hmong American students in Vue's (2013) study experienced. Despite these struggles, students at Coral Tree University and Redwood University were motivated to persist and not give up on their opportunity to be among their first in their families (and communities) to attend a prestigious research university.

Southeast Asian American students in this study also shared some of the characteristics of students in Ubaldo's study (2010) examining the pathways and transitions of Latino students. Students were also first-generation college students, low-income students, and minoritized students who encountered challenges on their academic pathways during college. Similarly, these students eventually developed an understanding of what resources and supports they needed to persist and pursued these strategies. Unlike more traditional models of student trajectories, the Pathways Model acknowledges that, "due to the challenges experienced, students may need to take an alternative route or detour in direction while maintaining their same goal" (p. 234). The Pathways Model is a helpful tool for examining the transition and identity development of diverse students during their first year of college, but this current study builds on Ubaldo's (2010) work by examining students' pathways into the university and throughout their tenure at their respective institutions. Therefore, I was also able to analyze for alternative routes or detours that occurred after students' critical first year at the university. As I discussed regarding Nathan's situation at Redwood University, he

was forced to choose a new major during his second year and persisted through a very stressful period of his life.

Promoting the use of counselors. The majority of students worked through the challenges they encountered during college with their peers, mentors, and in their culturally validating spaces, but it was clear that more students were also in need of professional support. Although peers' roles as informal counselors were valuable to students, fellow undergraduate students are not properly trained in academic or mental health counseling. Additionally, students may not be aware of policy or academic updates that their peers should be aware of in order to make appropriate academic decisions. Due to reasons such as a lack of knowledge about resources, knowing when and which resources to seek out, how they could use resources, and/or a hesitation/fear/stigma attached to counseling, few students sought the help of academic or mental health counselors during this first year. Cambodian American students in Chhuon and Hudley's (2008) study also struggled to find support at their university during their first year.

For these reasons, it is especially important for universities to have culturally responsive counselors who understand diverse students' backgrounds and the unique needs they have as university students (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). The majority of these students were 1.5- and second-generation American, first-generation college students, and many were low-income students; some students feared that counselors would not understand their identities. Xiong's (2015) study offered an examination of the ways culturally familiar community college counselors fostered a welcoming environment for Southeast Asian American men. He found that counselors were able to establish rapport, learn about the student as a person, effectively engage the student, be proactive about support, and have high

expectations of the student. These kinds of practices and the availability of culturally familiar counselors are important for making diverse students feel comfortable about seeking help. Coral Tree University and Redwood University had services such as the Educational Opportunity Program, Support Student Services, and a Student Outreach and Retention Center to meet diverse students' needs, but few first-year students were aware of these programs or the resources they offered. Of course, many of these services are advertised and promoted during university orientations, but it was clear from these students' experiences that their services should be marketed more frequently for freshmen and first year transfer students. More university effort is needed to demystify and destigmatize the counseling process for students in their universities.

Supporting student engagement. Harper and Quaye (2015) asserted that one point is certain in student persistence—"Those who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely to persist through graduation" (p. 3). This assertion has been backed by several empirical studies (e.g., Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2006; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, Gonyea, 2008; Pascarealla & Terenzini, 2005). We saw in this study that engagement outside of the classroom was an important and valuable aspect for Southeast Asian American students' persistence at Coral Tree University and Redwood University. Many students who struggled to transition during their first year eventually recognized the need to become more engaged in campus activities, and they saw their university experiences make a complete turnaround. College became a more enjoyable and fulfilling experience. Engaging in meaningful activities provided Southeast Asian American students with access to peers with similar interests, culturally similar peers, access to mentors and/or serve as mentors, access to a larger network of

resources, and culturally validating spaces that provided a safe space from the negative campus racial climate, helped students develop their ethnic identity, learn about and advocate for their communities, and a develop sense of belonging at their university. Several scholars have found similar benefits of student engagement in their studies with students of color (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Guiffrida, 2003; Kiang, 2002; Museus, 2008; Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015). Engaging in meaningful activities created opportunities for students to gain the necessary support for difference aspects of their lives.

According to Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2010), student engagement has two components that are important for student success: 1) the time and efforts students put into their academics and activities that lead to success, and 2) how institutions "allocate resources and organizing learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate in and benefit from such activities" (p. 9). The findings in this study lend support to the Kuh and colleagues' (2010) second assertion that institutions should invest in creating and supporting existing programs at their universities that support student engagement outside of the classroom. For example, the outreach and retention center at Redwood University not only provided students with counseling, programs, and resources, it also offered students the opportunities and support to develop their own outreach and retention programs. This was how Ethan developed a retention seminar for Southeast Asian American students at Redwood University. It is important to note that these programs also exist outside of institutionally supported spaces such as student affairs programs and campus cultural centers; students clubs and organizations need more institutional support for the valuable work they contribute to minoritized student persistence. Supporting the findings from Museus' (2010) study on the importance of targeted support programs for minoritized students at primarily white

institutions, these programs and organizations helped students create connections that aided in their adjustment to college and integrated students into larger campus support networks.

Supporting student-initiated programs. Universities need to support and cultivate students' sense of agency in developing programs that serve their unmet needs as diverse students. In this study, we saw students such as Ethan, Kim, Vivian, and others who took the initiative to start and/or revive ethnic clubs and organizations, develop high school outreach programs for fellow Southeast Asian American youth, and develop a retention seminar to support to their peers in the university. These programs were student-initiated and student-run, but were often offered minimal institutional support. The majority of funding for these initiatives was gained through their own fundraising efforts. Providing the opportunities to create these programs is not enough; universities need to acknowledge that students develop these spaces in order to serve their unmet needs and cultivate a sense of belonging on campus. These types of organizations and programs benefitted the students they were serving as well as the students who were organizing these efforts. Students developed organizational, programming, budgetary, communication, and leadership skills. These leaders also served as mentors who inspired other students to want to serve their communities. These findings were also reflected among the Southeast Asian American students in Maramba and Palmer's (2014) and Museus and colleagues' (2008, 2013) studies; students desired to advocate for and give back to their communities. While students at Coral Tree University and Redwood University were empowered by and proud of their efforts, they also reported that these efforts were emotionally and academically challenging due to a lack of institutional support. Students needed more than being provided with the space to develop these programs, but they also desired financial support and guidance from staff members.

These finding also supported Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista's (2005) study on student-initiated retention projects, which found that these projects arose because "students of color saw the need to take control of their own academic support and recruitment initiatives" (p.614). Unfortunately, this still appeared to be the case for underrepresented student groups such as Southeast Asian American students, who were not acknowledged by the University of California system as having underrepresented student status. Maldonado and colleagues' (2005) study was the first to examine these student-led movements in relation to understanding student persistence and retention, but few other studies exist on this valuable topic of student retention. They estimated that only a dozen or so student-initiated retention projects existed across the country at the time of their study, but similar to the efforts by students at Coral Tree University and Redwood University, they might also exist at other institutions but be unnoticed at their universities.

Cultural/institutional brokers and culturally validating environments. Cultural or institutional brokers are people or programs/organizations that help students to bridge across their worlds, and it should be noted that brokers do not need to be people or programs in the university setting (Cooper, 2011). In this study, the findings suggested that family members, friends made prior to college, mentors from high school and students' home communities, and high school and community outreach programs served as important cultural brokers for students on their pathway to the university and several continued to be important cultural brokers during their college experience. In the universities, we saw that faculty, staff members, and peers served as cultural brokers and clubs/organizations, cultural centers, Asian American Studies Departments, library archives, and the outreach and retention center served as important institutional brokers that helped students to bridge their worlds. Cultural

brokers did not need to be culturally similar to students in order to be effective brokers. For example, Dr. D, the director of the outreach and retention center at Redwood University, is a Latina woman and a well-respected mentor to several of the students from the university. However, the value of having culturally familiar cultural brokers was clearly illustrated in several students' educational experiences, and several students searched for peers and mentors who understood their identities and experiences. Unfortunately, some of the students in this study, such as Sophia, Charlie, Nathan, and Adam, were still searching for the right cultural brokers to support them in their university experience.

Cultural brokers were often found in the culturally validating environments on campus. Similar to several studies on the university experiences of students of color, culturally validating environments often served as "safe spaces" and "counter-spaces" against the feelings of isolation and marginalization that Southeast Asian American students' felt in general campus spaces (e.g,, Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2001). Students felt a sense of belonging in these spaces; for some students, they were the only spaces where students felt a sense of belonging at their universities. The findings also supported Inkelas' (2004) and Museus' (2008) studies which found that these spaces helped students develop a stronger sense of their racial and ethnic identities and Harper and Quaye's (2007)'s study which found that culturally validating organizations motivated black students to want to give back to their communities and other black students. This study adds to the list of benefits of these spaces by illustrating how these culturally validating environments also helped to open lines of communication between students and their parents. The knowledge that students gained in their Asian American Studies courses or in their ethnic clubs and organizations inspired students to share about their club experiences or begin to ask questions

about their families' histories and cultural practices. Since this was the first time that almost all of the students saw themselves reflected in the curriculum or in an educational setting, their education became a more personal experience that they could share with their families.

Cultivating more inclusive campus environments. As other studies on students of color have found, the findings suggested that Southeast Asian American university students experienced a negative campus racial climate at both universities (e.g., Ancis et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). This study contributed to the work on campus racial climate by finding that despite the fact that the largest student racial group at Redwood University comprised of Asian American and Pacific Islander students, Southeast Asian American students still experienced a negative campus racial climate. At both universities, students' ethnic and Southeast Asian American identities were more salient than their Asian American identities, and they were more likely to identify by their ethnicity or as Southeast Asian American. Students were aware of their group differences from East Asian American students, and therefore, still considered themselves as minoritized students at both universities. In fact, some students shared that they also experienced racial microaggressions from East Asian American students who looked down on their identities as Southeast Asian American students. Racism and racial microaggressions are still a problem at non-PWIs and something that universities should remain cognizant of their efforts to create more inclusive campus environments. This is especially important for Southeast Asian American students given the findings of Cress and Ikeda's (2003) study which found that Asian American students who experienced negative campus climates were more likely to experience depression. What does the outcome look like for Southeast Asian

American students who may experience racism and/or racial microaggressions from other students and their fellow Asian American counterparts?

This study also contributes to the literature on campus racial climate by revealing its extension beyond the campus environment and into student living communities. Most salient in the findings of the campus racial climate experiences of students at Coral Tree University was the prevalence of racism and racial microaggressions in the student living community adjacent to the university campus. As I discussed in Chapter 7, female students were taunted and fetishized on a nightly basis for being Asian American women and male students were threatened verbally and physically. The culprits of these acts were identified as primarily white students. This was an alarming finding and should be addressed by the university. This signals an urgent need for institutions to combat issues of racism and racial microaggressions on their campuses but also in student living communities. Despite the fact that Coral Tree University's demographics have shifted from being a predominantly white institution (PWI) to a traditionally white institution (TWI) with the increasing percentages of Latino and Asian American and Pacific Islander students, little has changed in terms of the cultural milieu of the campus and the student living communities.

University efforts to support a positive campus racial climate need to be visible, frequent, and mandatory. As part of their critique of university efforts, several students suggested the need to expand on ethnic studies requirements. It is not enough to require one class or to create programming on diversity and expect that perpetrators willingly show up to such events. Efforts to cultivate more inclusive campus environments need to be taken into consideration in all aspects of the institution and embedded in institutional structures. McNairy (1996) argued that institutions needed to be held more accountable for the retention

of students of color and avoid "retention traps." These traps included a lack of institutional responsibility and a lack of serious efforts to create a campus climate that values multicultural and multiracial diversity. To avoid these traps, institutions like Coral Tree University and Redwood University have to ensure that they are assessing the campus racial climate at their universities through quantitative and qualitative approaches rather than relying on the positive results of the University of California Campus Climate Study (2014). This study highlighted the value of qualitative methods in examining campus racial climate, whereas the vast majority of studies that have examined campus racial climate used qualitative methods. Students' interviews revealed what their surveys did not, especially for students who marked that they were satisfied with the campus racial climate. For example, some students experienced incidents of racism and racial microaggressions but rationalized that these problems were with the individual and had little faith in the university to fix these issues.

Improving campus environments and changing institutional structures is critical in this current time as our universities continue to become more diverse and as students are demanding (and deserve) to be heard and respected at their universities. Although researchers have argued since the early 1990s (e.g. Chang, 1999; Hurtado, 1992; Tierney, 1992) that institutions need to be accountable for meeting diverse students' needs, the issue has finally gained national attention in the public domain. Students' fight for racial justice has led to the resignation of the president and chancellor of the University of Missouri[12] and the dean of students at Claremont McKenna College[13], and students at several universities are riding on this momentum to inspire change at their own universities. It is imperative that universities

[12] http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/embattled-u-of-missouri-president-resigns-after-mounting-protests-over-racism/106512
[13] http://chronicle.com/article/Facing-Protests-About-Racial/234191

begin to question their institutional models and work to dismantle the systems of white privilege that exist in these models in order to cultivate more inclusive campus environments for all students.

Concluding discussion. This study contributes to existing literature by providing the most comprehensive examination of Southeast Asian American students' educational pathways from high school through their university experiences. While other studies have focused on the impact of social capital (Palmer and Maramba, 2015) and cultural factors (Maramba and Palmer, 2014; Museus et al., 2013) on Southeast Asian American college students' experiences, this study provided a more holistic view of students' experiences by asking them to identify the worlds that were most important to them (Cooper, 2011). By examining these worlds, how they interacted with each other, and how they interacted with the university environment, we gained perspective on how students' personal (family & community), academic, social, and institutional experiences impacted their persistence in the university. With these findings, I suggest a new model for examining Southeast Asian American student persistence that incorporates these considerations (Appendix G).

Also, by contextualizing their experiences in two demographically distinct campus settings, the findings revealed that Southeast Asian American students are still minoritized in both settings. These findings further lend to the argument that: 1) We need to stop viewing Asian Americans as a monolithic group and support the data disaggregation movement, and 2) We need to move past the stereotypes that plague Southeast Asian American students as "model minorities" or "deviant minorities" (Museus, 2014; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Um, 2003). This study demonstrates the value of examining the lived experiences of Southeast Asian

American university students through a qualitative approach, thereby making their voices heard and their experiences visible.

As the focus on the retention and graduation of underrepresented student groups remains a central focus of higher education institutions, we cannot continue to neglect student groups that remain invisible to university administration. I focused my efforts on examining the educational experiences of Southeast Asian American students in academically rigorous research universities because they are still not acknowledged as an underserved and underrepresented student group in higher education despite what the data shows (CARE, 2011; SEARAC, 2011; UCOP, 2014). As found in this study, Southeast Asian American students were also highly aware of their invisibility within their universities. Despite this invisibility, we saw that Southeast Asian American students were working hard at both universities to bridge their own worlds for themselves, their peers, and future Southeast Asian American students. With various sources of support, students learned how to persist in the university by creating the changes that were necessary for their success.

Implications of the Study

Implications for research. This study adds to a growing body of literature on Southeast Asian American students in higher education (e.g., Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Chhuon et al., 2010; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus et al., 2013; Phommasa, 2015; Um, 2003; Vue, 2013), but there is still a need to understand the diversity of issues within each Southeast Asian American ethnic group. For example, there were only two Lao American students included in this study, and no Lao American females. Although it was not an exhaustive search of the university, the difficulty of finding Lao American students at both universities is cause for concern. This was also an issue in my master's research, where only

one out of ten Lao American college students were enrolled in a four-year university (Phommasa, 2014). We need to examine why Lao American students are not enrolling in academically rigorous universities so we can offer appropriate methods of support to these students.

This study also demonstrated the value of combining multiple theoretical frameworks in order to gain a more holistic understanding of diverse students' educational experiences. By choosing a framework that draws on students' family, home, community, and past schooling experiences (Cooper, 2002, 2011), we were able to see how these experiences continue to shape students' experiences during college. In addition to this, using both survey and qualitative methods allowed me to probe for more depth in students' histories and stories. Survey responses provided a valuable guide to gain richer, more nuanced interview responses. These methods were especially valuable when examining students' campus racial climate experiences, because their interview responses often countered their survey responses and the positive campus climate findings of the University of California Campus Climate Study (2014). The study also has implications for examining the experiences of other underrepresented student groups. The frameworks and methods used in this study can be applied to other minoritized student groups in order to understand how their experiences may be similar or unique from Southeast Asian American students and how to best support student persistence.

Implications for practice. This study has several implications for higher education institutions, especially in academic affairs and student affairs. The findings illustrated the value of student organizations, campus resource centers, campus cultural centers, and the potential to increase the value of counselors. By understanding the indispensible role that

these types of programs and organizations have in contributing to Southeast Asian American students' persistence, we need to ensure that their resources are promoted widely and frequently to students. The more we outreach to students, the more likely we can reach the students who are hesitant or unsure about getting involved. However, universities also need to be cautious of how they are marketing their materials and who their target audience is. If programs and organizations operate with the UC Office of the President's (2014) definition of "underrepresented students" and frame the language in their materials to refer to specific racial groups, then this marginalizes students like Southeast Asian Americans do not fit into this category as Asian Americans. In addition to this, universities need to ensure that they are hiring culturally diverse and culturally responsive staff and counselors who can meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

Universities should also support student agency by offering more support to student organizations that have developed outreach and retention programs or create opportunities for students to develop such programs where they do not exist. However, students need more than being provided the opportunities and financial support to create these programs. They also need guidance and resources from professionals who are trained in this work. Coordinating these programs produce several positive benefits for the students who organize and lead these programs as well as for the students who are participating in the programs. Universities need to acknowledge the work that students are doing to support their peers and benefit the campus community.

Also, establishing mentoring programs between diverse students and fellow undergraduate students, university staff, and faculty members would be valuable in helping low-income, underrepresented, and first-generation college students adjust to the university.

Kuh and colleagues' (2010) book on colleges and universities that utilized effective educational practices emphasized the value of schools that supported meaningful student-faculty interactions through mentoring programs. Mentors can provide students with such benefits as advising, access to campus networks, and dispelling myths that staff and faculty are intimidating.

Implications for policy. Southeast Asian American students need visibility, and universities need to acknowledge that Southeast Asian Americans are an underrepresented student group in higher education. Without this acknowledgement, students will continue existing under the radar of educators, counselors, and student support programs. There has been a concerted effort by educational researchers (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education)[14], advocacy groups[15], and policy makers[16] to promote further data disaggregation among educational institutions in California, but Governor Brown vetoed Assembly Bill 176 in October 2015. These efforts need to continue.

Investment in programs like AVID and EOP should continue to be supported and need to be expanded. These types of programs were critical for many students to gain knowledge and resources about colleges and universities. Several of the students in this study would not have had the opportunities to learn about the University of California system or been able to visit campuses without these organizations. These programs supplement much of the knowledge that students cannot gain from their friends and families, but they also need to reach a wider range of students who could benefit from these resources.

[14] http://care.gseis.ucla.edu/icount-project/

[15] http://www.searac.org/new/searac-statement-ab176veto

[16] http://asmdc.org/members/a18/about/api-black-latino-caucuses-support-bonta-s-ab-176

Institutions need to ensure that they are hiring diverse faculty and staff members in order to reflect the growing diverse student populations. In 1997, Asian Americans comprised 5.8% of the full-time faculty in higher education, while African Americans represented 5% of the full-time faculty and Latinos represented 2% of the full-time faculty (Harvey, 2001; Quaye et al., 2015). As this study found, Southeast Asian American students finding it difficult to identify faculty and staff members that they can identify with. Not only can there be an increased level of comfort, students who see faculty that reflect their own identities can also envision themselves in similar positions.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations in this study. First, due to limitations in research funding, the study was limited to 24 students from two universities and only 12 students from each university. Therefore, this study cannot be representative of the experiences of all Southeast Asian American students in academically rigorous universities. While I sampled for maximum variation in ethnicity and gender, I cannot distinguish between differences in experiences by gender and ethnicity. Also, due to snowball techniques and word-of-mouth advertisement among students, this study contained a large number of students who were involved in ethnic clubs and organizations. I cannot determine whether the findings speak to a large number of Southeast Asian American students at both universities who are uninvolved; however, there were also students in this study who were not involved in ethnic clubs and organizations.

Also, the study was designed as a one-time interview, but due to the high level of interest and the amount of information that was asked of students, interviews could have been divided into two-part meetings. Students were eager to participate and willing to share

their stories, but once interviews began running longer than an hour and half, both the researcher (myself) and participants would start waning in energy. In addition to this, I had up to four interviews scheduled in one day at Redwood University in order to minimize the number of research trips required. Interviews should have been scheduled to discuss students' families and past experiences in part one and to discuss their college experiences in part two.

The study could have also explored students' and their families' financial situation in more depth. Although I asked about financial supports and challenges, I did not explore their families' income levels and how this impacted their educational pathways. For example, some students were provided with an endless number of educational resources and extracurricular activities in order to remain competitive for college, while other students relied on the aid of programs like AVID to gain their necessary resources for college. In addition to this, we saw how students like Charlie and Henry, who relied on their parents for financial support, seriously considered leaving the university due to financial hardship, while students like Laura and Molly, who worked for survival, did not let finances stand in the way of their education.

Also, this study would benefit from examining students' ethnic identity development using theoretical frameworks. Although examining ethnic identity was not a focus of this study, the data that emerged provided valuable insight into how culturally validating environments can support students' identity development. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn's (2010) work on student development theories provides useful frameworks such as Kim's (2001) model of Asian American identity development and Phinney's (1990) model of ethnic identity development for future examination of Southeast Asian American students'

ethnic identities. Currently, there are no models for Southeast Asian American ethnic identity development.

Lastly, this study could have benefitted from using intersectionality as another framework for understanding students' experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, Henry and Isabel discussed their queer identities in their interviews and provided a glimpse into how these identities intersected with their ethnic identities, but I did not probe too far into these identities. While I focused on students' ethnic identities, this study could have benefitted by allowing students to identify their multiple identities in addition to identifying their multiple worlds. We saw some examples of how their intersectional identities impacted their university experiences, such as the catcalls that Beth and Sara received in their student living community for being Asian American females, but further analysis with this framework could have added more depth to this study.

Future Research

Student persistence and retention will continue to remain an important issue in higher education (Braxton et al., 2014), but it will also remain a critical issue in the Southeast Asian American community if students continue to be overlooked and underserved in higher education. Although this study provided a valuable understanding of the experiences of Southeast Asian American students in the academically rigorous universities, it has not fully captured the experiences of the majority of Southeast Asian American students in higher education. In addition to the desire to expand my study to other research universities, I hope to expand my work into less selective four-year colleges and community colleges. Southeast Asian American students who are enrolled in higher education are more likely to be enrolled in these institutions (CARE, 2013), so it is necessary to understand the issues that impact

student persistence and retention in different types of institutions in order to provide the most appropriate methods of support for all students to succeed and graduate.

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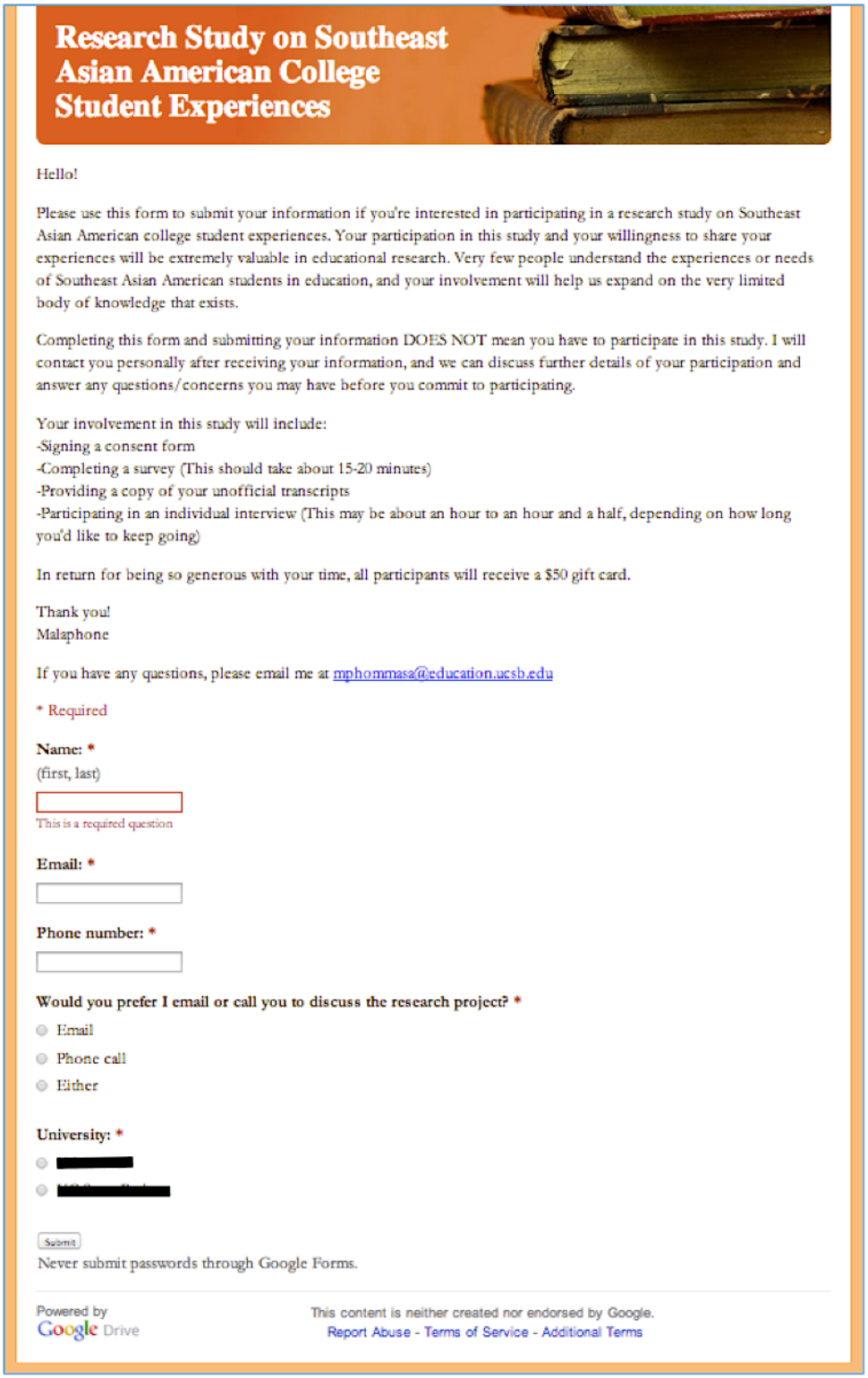
Appendix A

Web Form for Participants



Research Study on Southeast Asian American College Student Experiences

Hello!

Please use this form to submit your information if you're interested in participating in a research study on Southeast Asian American college student experiences. Your participation in this study and your willingness to share your experiences will be extremely valuable in educational research. Very few people understand the experiences or needs of Southeast Asian American students in education, and your involvement will help us expand on the very limited body of knowledge that exists.

Completing this form and submitting your information DOES NOT mean you have to participate in this study. I will contact you personally after receiving your information, and we can discuss further details of your participation and answer any questions/concerns you may have before you commit to participating.

Your involvement in this study will include:
-Signing a consent form
-Completing a survey (This should take about 15-20 minutes)
-Providing a copy of your unofficial transcripts
-Participating in an individual interview (This may be about an hour to an hour and a half, depending on how long you'd like to keep going)

In return for being so generous with your time, all participants will receive a $50 gift card.

Thank you!
Malaphone

If you have any questions, please email me at mphommasa@education.ucsb.edu

* Required

Name: *
(first, last)

This is a required question

Email: *

Phone number: *

Would you prefer I email or call you to discuss the research project? *

- Email
- Phone call
- Either

University: *

- [redacted]
- [redacted]

Submit

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Appendix B

Research Flyer

Appendix C

Southeast Asian American College Student Experiences Survey

Southeast Asian American College Student Experiences

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The survey should take about 20-30 minutes to complete. The information that you provide on this survey will be helpful in guiding our interview and very valuable in helping us understand the experiences of Southeast Asian American students' experiences in college.

If you have any questions while you are filling out the survey or are unclear on how to answer a question, please do not hesitate to contact Malaphone at *mphommasa@education.ucsb.edu*.

When you are finished, please contact Malaphone to pick up or drop off the survey OR send this in the pre-addressed/stamped envelope that was provided to you. Please do not forget to include a printed copy of your unofficial college transcripts. If you are a transfer student, please include the transcript from your previous schools.

Students who participate in both the survey and interview will receive a $50 gift card. Students who chose to end participation with only the survey will receive a $20 gift card.

Name (first, last):_____ Date: _____

Local address: _____ Permanent address: _____

_____ _____

Birthdate:_____(include month/date/year) Phone number:_____ (circle) Cell Home

What is your ethnicity? _____

What generation American are you? (circle one)

1st *(born abroad and immigrated here)* 2nd *(born in America, parents born abroad)* 3rd *(parents born in America)* 4th+

University you are attending:_____

Your class standing at your university (circle one):

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Senior+

How many years have you been at your university? _____

Did you transfer to your university from another school? (circle) Yes No

If you circled "Yes": Where did you transfer from? _____

What year did you transfer? _____

Major(s):_____ Minor(s):_____

Overall GPA:_____ Are you satisfied with your GPA? (circle) Yes No

If you circled "No", please provide a brief explanation: _____

_____

List any quarters you have been on the Dean's Honor List:_____

List any quarters you have been on Academic Probation:_____

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR FAMILY?

Please tell us about the people you consider to be part of your family. Use as few or as many of the spaces below as you need. Your list might include relatives or people who are like family to you. People you might include are: mother, father, sister, brother, grandparents, stepmother, stepfather, uncle, aunt, niece, cousin, housemate, romantic partner, etc. If you live with someone during holidays and summers but not during the academic year, circle **S**.

Family member (relation to you, not name)	**Live with you?** (circle Yes No, or Summers)	**Age in years** (write in)	**State or country of birth** (write in)	**Gender** (circle Male, Female, or Other)	**Ethnicity or ethnicities** (write in)	**Job or occupation** (write in)	**Highest grade completed in foreign country** (write in)	**Highest grade completed in U.S.** (circle one: EJ-elementary or jr. high/ HS-high school/ SC-some college/ C-college/ PG-post-college graduate/ N-none)	**Languages you use with this person** (circle all that apply: E (English)/ V(Vietnamese)/ C(Cambodian)/ L(Lao)/H(Hmong)/O(Other: please write in)
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:
	Y/N/S			M/F/O				EJ/ HS/ SC/ C/ PG/N	E/ V/ C/ L/ O:

WHAT ARE YOUR WORLDS?

On this page, please draw a circle around each of your worlds. Your worlds are the communities you consider yourself to be part of. Please write in and circle the names of any worlds we have not listed but that are important to you.

family (you lived with growing up)

other family (if you have more than one)

extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.)

neighborhood (you grew up in)

housemates in college

religious place of worship

friends (pre-college)

sports teams

clubs/organizations

friends (from college)

college

music

academic support programs

WHAT DO PEOPLE EXPECT OF YOU IN YOUR MAIN WORLDS?

From the page above, think about the worlds marked in ***bold*** print ***plus another one*** of your choice. Then from the lists below, select ***up to 6 expectations*** that people in each world have for you. ***Write them inside each circle***-- you can write the numbers rather than write out the words.
If a world has an expectation that is not on the list, just write it in.

Positive

1. work hard
2. stay in college
3. be sure of myself
4. be smart
5. support others
6. be good looking
7. help others financially
8. be loyal and trustworthy
9. be a good student
10. have a college-based career
11. will complete college
12. have a math- or science-based career
13. have a good job
14. be rich
15. be successful
16. will have a family in the future
17. help the community
18. be respectful
19. be honest
20. be responsible
21. Other: _____

Negative

22. be lazy
23. drop out of college
24. be unsure of myself
25. be dumb
26. be selfish
27. be ugly
28. not help others financially
29. be disloyal and untrustworthy
30. be a poor student
31. not have a college-based career
32. will not complete college
33. not have a career involving math or science
34. be unemployed
35. be poor
36. fail
37. will have a family too early
38. will steal from or hurt people
39. be disrespectful
40. be dishonest
41. be irresponsible
42. Other: _____

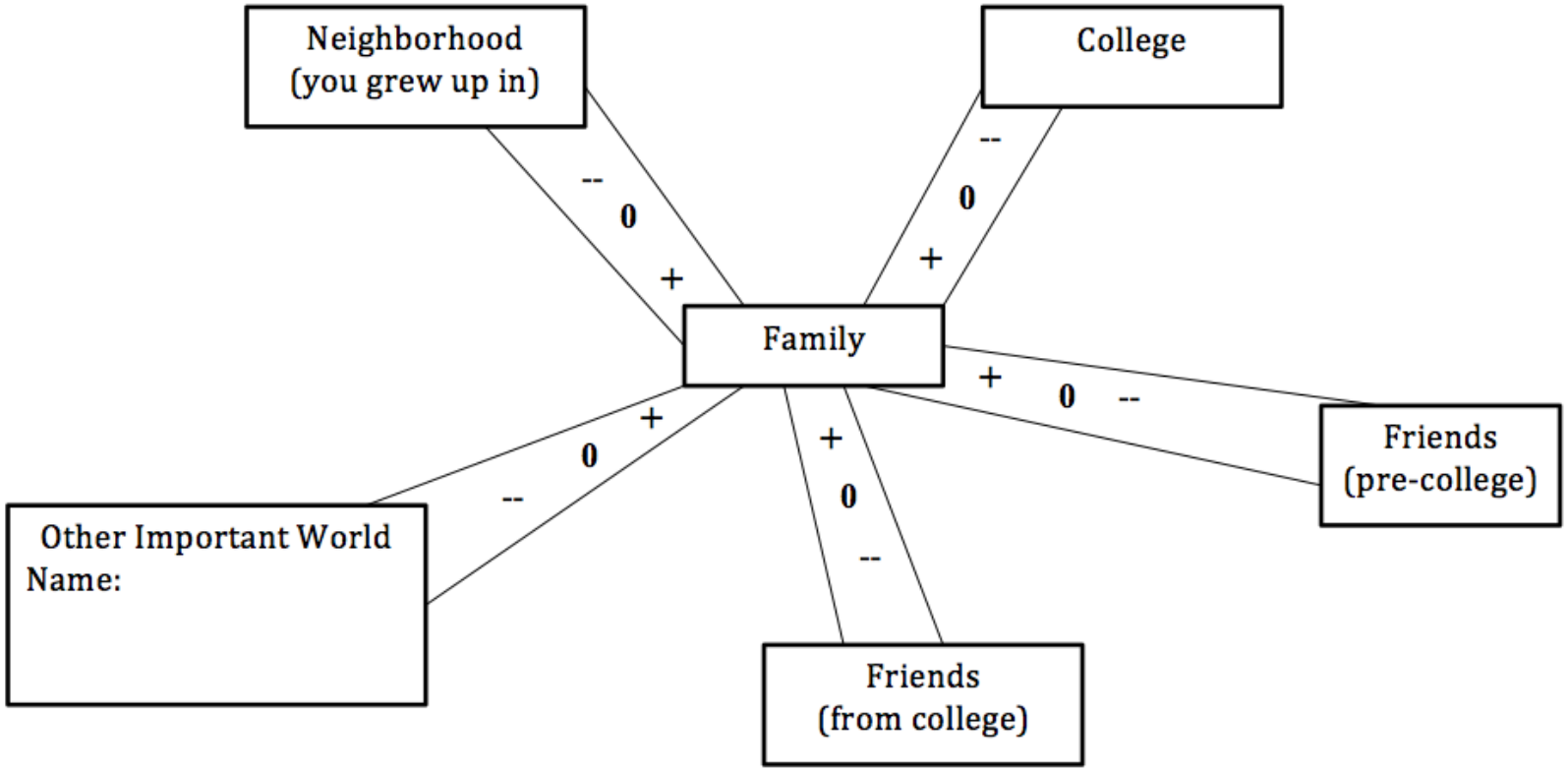
HOW DO EXPECTATIONS IN EACH OF YOUR DIFFERENT WORLDS FIT TOGETHER?

To describe how the expectations of the family you grew up with fit into each of your worlds, please circle the **+, 0,** or **--** inside each bridge.

+ = expectations in these worlds fit together really well for me

0 = expectations in these worlds are not connected for me

-- = expectations in these worlds are in conflict for me



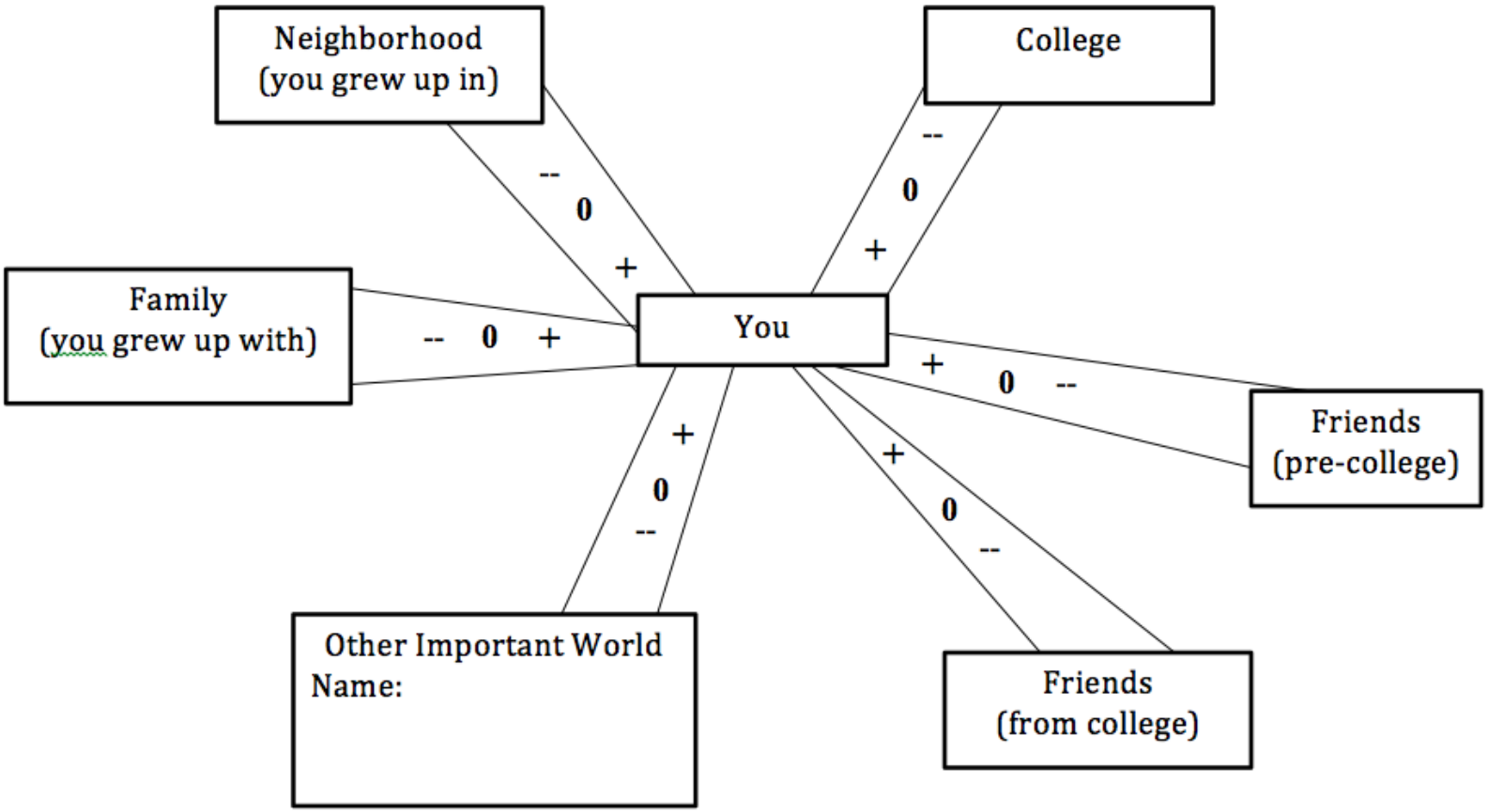
HOW DO EXPECTATIONS IN EACH OF YOUR DIFFERENT WORLDS FIT WITH YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR YOURSELF?

To describe how the expectations of yourself fit with the expectations in each of your worlds, please circle the **+, 0,** or **--** inside each bridge.

+ = expectations in these worlds fit together really well for me

0 = expectations in these worlds are not connected for me

-- = expectations in these worlds are in conflict for me



HOW INFLUENTIAL ARE YOUR WORLDS?

Please rank how influential your main worlds have been on…

Worlds: *Family; Neighborhood (you grew up in); Friends (pre-college); Friends (from college); College; The world of your choice*

1 = most influential

2 and beyond = lessening in influence

why you are in college.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

your educational/career plans.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

*Note: If there is someone or something that has been more influential than the worlds listed here, you will have the opportunity to discuss this on page 18.

WHO HELPS YOU?

Is there anyone who…

- **helped you get to college?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **helps you stay on track in college?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **helps you with coursework?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **helps you keep up with responsibilities and stay organized?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **helps you plan your future?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **helps you feel confident?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **helps you with sexism or racism?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **helps you by speaking up for you with your parents?** If **yes**, fill in answers below.If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **helps you by speaking up for you at school?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

WHO CAUSES YOU DIFFICULTIES?

Is there anyone who…

- **caused you difficulties when you were trying to get into college?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) *age* *gender(M/F/Other)* *ethnicity* *What world(s)*

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **causes difficulties for you with coursework?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) *age* *gender(M/F/Other)* *ethnicity* *What world(s)*

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **discourages you in school?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) *age* *gender(M/F/Other)* *ethnicity* *What world(s)*

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **causes difficulties for you in school?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **causes difficulties for you in keeping up with responsibilities and staying organized?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **causes difficulties in planning your future?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **causes difficulties for you in feeling self confident?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

- **causes difficulties for you with sexism or racism?** If **yes**, fill in answers below. If **no**, skip to next question.
  Who (relation to you, not name) age gender(M/F/Other) ethnicity What world(s)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____
  4. _____

RACIAL/ETHNIC EXPERIENCES AT YOUR UNIVERSITY

Please answer the following questions regarding your racial/ethnic experiences at your university.

Do you consider there to be a sufficient number of Southeast Asian American students at your university? (circle) Yes No

Do you consider there to be a sufficient number of students of the same ethnicity that you identify as? (circle) Yes No

Do you purposely seek out friends who are of the same ethnicity as you or are Southeast Asian American? (circle) Yes No

Please explain:_____

Are you involved in any ethnic student clubs or organizations at your university? (circle) Yes No

If you circled "Yes", please list the clubs or organizations: _____

_____

Have you interacted with any Southeast Asian American professors? (circle)Yes No I don't know of any.

gender M/F/Other *Department* *Under what circumstances did you interact with this person?*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Have you interacted with any Southeast Asian American staff members? (circle) Yes No I don't know of any.

gender M/F/Other *Department* *Under what circumstances did you interact with this person?*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Have you interacted with any Southeast Asian American administrators? (circle) Yes No I don't know of any.

gender M/F/Other *Department* *Under what circumstances did you interact with this person?*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Do you feel like there are enough opportunities for you to express your cultural heritage on your campus? (circle) Yes No

Do you feel like your identity as a Southeast Asian American student is valued at your university? (circle) Yes No

Have you had the opportunity to take courses at your university that reflect the history or culture of your heritage? (circle) Yes No

Are you interested in taking courses at your university that reflect the history or culture of your heritage? (circle) Yes No

Have you experienced incidents of racism (including racial microaggressions) at your university? (circle) Yes No

*Racial microaggressions are subtle, preconscious or unconscious, insults directed towards people of color. (ex. "You're Asian—you must be good at math.")

Are you satisfied with the campus racial climate at your university? (circle) Yes No

FUTURE PLANS

Please answer the following questions regarding your plans for the future and the plans your family would like to see in your future.

You

What is the highest degree *you* plan to earn?_____

What occupation or job would *you* like to have when you finish school?_____

Your Family

What is the highest degree *your family* would like you to earn?_____

What occupation or job would *your family* like you to have when you finish school?_____

Does the occupation or job you want for your future match the career your family wants for your future? (circle) Yes No

If you circled "No", is this a source of conflict between you and your family? (circle) Yes No

WE WANT YOUR OPINION ABOUT…

What people or experiences have been major influences on your plans for the future? Important people may be teachers, family members, friends or other people. The experiences that have influenced you may be positive or negative, such as a field trip to a college or a friend getting into trouble. We would appreciate your telling us about your important experiences.

Thank you so much for your help!

*Note: Survey adapted from the *Bridging Worlds Survey.*

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Appendix D

Interview Guide

Student's Background
(Greeting questions to establish rapport)
1. So you're a (class standing), what is your major?
    a. What classes are you taking this quarter?

***
[IF TRANSFER STUDENT]

From CC:
2. What were the reasons that led you to attend community college before transferring to your university?
    a. How did you decide to come to this university?
    b. How was the transfer process?
        i. Was there anyone who helped you with the transfer process?

3. How do you feel about your decision to come to this university?

***

6. What made you decide to go to college?
    a. What influenced your decision to attend a UC?

7. Who or what do you think was most influential in your decision to go to college?

8. You mentioned on your survey that _____ helped you get into college. How did they help you?

9. Who or what has been most supportive of you while you are in college?
    a. Can you explain how they have been supportive?

10. So you said the highest degree you would like to earn is _____ and your career goal is to be a _____. Can you tell me what made you decide you wanted to earn a _____ and be a _____?

11. On your survey, you say that your family would like you to earn a _____ and be a _____.
    a. Why do you think they chose those options for you?
    b. *[If they said it was source of conflict on the survey]* How have you and your family handled these differences in aspirations?

12. Can you explain whether going to college was something that was expected of you in your family?

Bridging Multiple Worlds

13. Can you describe the community(ies) you grew up in before college?
    a. What were the different racial/ethnic groups that lived in these neighborhoods?
    b. How would you describe the economic levels of the families who lived there?

14. You described your neighborhood as _____, did you also have an ethnic community that you belonged to?

15. How would you define "success"?

[SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FROM THE "WORLDS" PORTION OF THE SURVEY]

16. You listed your main worlds as: _____. What role do each of these worlds have in your life?

17. *[Referring to survey: expectations of worlds fitting together]* Here, it looks like you said these worlds don't have compatible expectations. What kind of impact has this had on you?
    a. How has it affected you emotionally?
    b. How has it affected you academically?

18. *[Referring to survey: expectations of worlds fitting with expectations of self]* Here, you say that your expectations are in conflict with these worlds. What kind of impact has this had on you?
    a. How was it affected you emotionally?
    b. How has it affected you academically?

College Experience

19. How has your college experience has been so far?
    a. What else do you hope to do before you graduate?

20. How are you doing academically?
    a. [If not satisfied with GPA] On your survey, you said that you're not satisfied with your GPA, can you tell me more about this?
        i. [Have been/On Academic Probation] For the quarters that you have been on AP, can you explain what happened?

[Who Helps You?/ Who Causes you Difficulties?]
21. Who has provided you with support in college?
    a. Academically?
    b. Socially?
    c. Financially?
    d. Emotionally?

22. [Specific question] Can you describe how these people have supported you in_____.

23. [Specific question] You did not list anyone for _____. What kind of support would you like in this area?

24. Who or what has made your college experience difficult?
    a. Academically?
    b. Socially?
    c. Financially?
    d. Emotionally?

25. [Specific question] Can you describe how these people have caused you difficulty with _____.

26. So we've all had moments where we didn't want to be here anymore or have thought about why we are in school, can you share any times where you have felt this way?
    a. What made you feel this way?
    b. What made you decide to stay? Who or what helped you stay in college?

27. Since your time here, do you know anyone who has decided to leave the university?
    a. Why do you think he/she left?

<u>Cultural Validation</u>

28. What clubs or organizations are you involved in?
    a. How did you decide to get involved in clubs or organizations on campus?

29. On your survey, you wrote that you were involved with _____[ethnic clubs/orgs].
    a. How are you involved with these clubs/orgs?
    b. How have participating in these clubs/orgs contributed to your college experience?

30. How would you describe the friends you have made in college?
    a. How do they compare to the friends you had before coming to college?

31. You said that there (are/aren't) a substantial number of Southeast Asian American/_____ students at your university, and you (do/don't) seek friends who are of the same ethnicity or are SEAA. What role have coethnics (Use SEAA or their ethnicity) had in your college experience on this campus?
    a. Do you consider it to be an important aspect of your college experience?
    b. How would your college experience be different if there were/weren't a substantial number of SEAA students at this university?
    c. What is it like to be a _____/SEAA student on this campus? [Opportunity to express cultural heritage/valued identity]
        i. Please explain how you (do/don't) feel your identity as a _____ is valued at this university.

32. On your survey, you said that you (were/weren't) interested in taking courses that reflect the history or culture of your heritage. How important is it that these opportunities are available at universities?

(The following questions will ask you to discuss issues of race/ethnicity and the racial climate of your university. You may choose not to answer any questions you are not comfortable with.)

Campus Racial Climate

33. What do you think about the level of diversity on your campus? This could be diversity in terms of racial/ethnic, gender, LGBTQ, etc.
    a. How much do you think this university values having diverse students?
    b. How much do you think this university values having diverse administrators, faculty, and staff?

34. How would you describe the campus racial climate at your university?
    a. How many issues of racism on this campus since you started here?
        i. How did this impact you?
    b. On your survey, you indicated that you (have/have not) experienced instances of racism at your university,
        i. [Have] How did this affect your college experience?
        ii. [Have not] How prevalent do you think this issue is on your campus?

35. In thinking about the campus racial climate, how well do you feel like you belong on this campus?
    a. How does this affect or not affect your academic and social life?

36. How much of an effort do you think the university makes an effort to recruit, retain, and support the graduation of students of color?

37. What do you think your university can do to support a more positive campus racial climate?

Appendix E

Codebook

Reason pursuing major/minor
Reason in college (What made you decide to go to college?)
Reason for selecting UC
Why [Coral Tree University]/[Redwood University]
Most influential to go to college (Who/what?)
Helped get into college
Most supportive during college
Academic and career aspirations
Family's aspirations
Student vs family aspirations
Community People in the community Ethnic community
Defines success
Worlds
Comparing expectations
Assessing College experience
Support Academic Social Financial Emotional
Areas Lacking Support
Difficulties Academic Social Financial Emotional
Leaving university
Clubs and organizations
Friends
Southeast Asian/ (Ethnicity) students If there were more SEA students on campus If there were less SEA students on campus Purposely seek friends who are SEA/same ethnicity
Opportunities to express cultural heritage
Southeast Asian identity
Courses that reflect cultural heritage
Sense of belonging
Campus diversity
Campus racial climate

Incidents of racism/racial microaggressions
University's role
University support for students of color

Appendix F

Sample Analytic Memo

Henry/ [Redwood University]

Reason pursuing majors/minor
1. began as biomedical engineering pre-med major but was too challenging so switched to bio sci major but ran into same issues with science classes
2. began to reassess interests and strengths- community service and networking, went to see career counselor at [Redwood University] to ask for advice on what path to take
3. career counselor said he could drop out because don't need degree, need experience to be in public relations- but determined to complete education
4. international studies allowed him to carve own classes and study abroad
5. considered Public Health Sciences but too expensive for course books/Social Policy and Public Service easier because in the same school and aligned with goals for future/ staying for a 5th year
6. counselor was honest with her feedback and advice/ not as helpful as could've been, decided to choose new major on his own
7. when searching for major- went to see counselors at each school to ask for more details about major, requirements, and career path/ tries to be very proactive

Henry entered [Redwood University] as a biomedical engineering premed major but struggled in all of his classes. He then switched to bio sci, but ran into the same struggles. At this point, he decided to reassess what his interests and strengths were- which were community service and networking. Henry took the initiative to see a career counselor at [Redwood University] to ask about his options for majors. Because he's interested in PR, she told him he could drop out of school since you don't need a degree and just need experience in that industry. However, Henry was very determined to complete his education and decided to choose a new major on his own. During this process, he went to see counselors in each of the schools he was interested in to learn more about each major. We see he is very proactive in advocating for himself, doing what he needs to do to make his decisions.

Reason in college
8. not a choice in Asian American family- heavy influence, only a question of where

Reason for selecting UC
9. older sisters applied but didn't get into UC, mom assume UC a better quality education, Cal State LB is a family tradition- siblings all attend
10. only accepted to [Redwood University], mom dissuaded from attending cc because of god brother's experience

Henry is the only one of his siblings who was accepted into a UC and so his mother made sure he attended.

Most influential to go to college
11. mom- has a really good relationship with her
12. parents attended University of Iowa- mom an RN and dad a computer programmer, parents have worked really hard

His parents both migrated from Vietnam and attended college in the U.S. Definitely expected of children.

Helped get into college
13. mom encouraged to be involved in community from an early age (5th grade) to know what work is, very heavily involved in high school
14. father primary source of funding
15. parents would drive all over OC for volunteering

In order to teach her children about the value of a dollar and hard work, his mom encouraged them to do community work from a young age. Henry is the only one of his siblings who remains heavily involved in community work.

Most supportive during college
16. mom and second sister- very honest with opinions but very supportive, helped shape how he found his path in college

Academic and career aspirations
(earn MSW and be in Public Relations and Community Outreach)
17. interested in public relations and outreach because of past experience with non-profit and campus organizations, articulate and good at writing, has organized events
18. attended several student activism conferences in last academic year and met an MSW who was carving his own path in his program- wants to enter into social justice field

Henry is deeply rooted in the social justice world and wants to remain in that world for his career. He met an MSW candidate at a student activism conference, which seems to have shown him what his path could be/ inspired his concrete career goals.

Family's aspirations
19. grew up thinking he would become a doctor so he went along with it when applying for college
20. mom panicked when he suggested music major and advised him to choose biomed engineering pre-med on all applications
21. thinks could've gotten into better schools if he chose better
22. family did not react well to the switch- second sister and mom did not approve, considered them unsupportive, tension with mom because of her reaction but working on it over last 2 years
23. family slowly starting to understand PR, explaining industry to mom, family pushing grad school and not allowing time off after undergrad
24. considered AsAm for grad school, but family doesn't understand where that will lead

25. family has more understanding of MSW but a very linear perspective on education → career
26. trying to be transparent with family to avoid problems

Henry grew up thinking he was going to become a doctor so when applying for college, he took his moms advice and chose to major in BME pre med on all of his applications. He now regrets that decision because he thinks he could've gotten into a better school if he had chosen wisely.

When he switched out of his science majors, his family did not approve. His sister was convinced he loved the topic so he shouldn't switch, and his mother was very disapproving. This caused some tension between him and his mom for awhile, which they had working on improving for the last two years.

He does openly communicate his thoughts and plans with his family, and they're very honest with their opinions. It seems like he tries to explain things to his family as much as he can, even though they have a very linear idea of majors leading to careers.

His family is very adamant on Henry going to grad school right after college and is not allowing him to take time off after.

Communities
27. grew up in a predominantly white community so felt disconnected from Vietnamese community, only connected when went into Little Saigon with mom
28. extended family is far so it's like he doesn't have one- almost like strangers to him
29. neighborhood mostly white and everyone did their own thing
30. high school was predominantly white, "had a lot of privilege", but also AsAm families who wanted their children to attend the school
31. cousin who lived outside school zone used family's address to attend HS

Henry grew up in predominantly white community in Fountain Valley so he felt disconnected from the Vietnamese community. Interesting, because Fountain Valley is only a few minutes from Little Saigon—which he does go to with his mom occasionally. No extended family nearby.

Defines success
32. fulfilling goals- bridging social justice and PR in large corporation, wants to bridge the communities he's part of

Worlds
33. been introduced into social justice community, more comfortable with atmosphere at LA and Berkeley than [Redwood University]- more hostile
34. family doesn't understand social justice but trying to explain
35. "one of the more meaningful worlds"
36. queer community- started queer AAPI organization, didn't know what it meant to be queer prior to college (conferences)

37. on a dance team- choreography and hip hop
38. dance community pitted against social justice community- radicals say an appropriation of black culture, dance community doesn't recognize these issues because "innate in our culture"
39. social justice community needs to education rather than judge
40. also involved in greek community, need to education instead of shaming
41. position in greek community and social justice community gives him access to bridge communities
42. contributes interview experience and public speaking to volunteer work
43. family has normative views on "man", "very conservative", felt distanced from family views when learned more in social justice world, have conversations about views but ends in dead end
44. brother is only one who understands his views but these aren't concerns for him
45. discusses these issues with parents and family all the time, tension builds with mom because doesn't understand each other
46. sees a psychologist, mom asked him to when he came out

Social justice community/ Queer community/ Dance community/ Greek community

There seems to be clear tensions between his communities and more so stemming from his social justice communities and their criticisms of the other communities that he belongs to. However, he thinks that some members of the SJ community takes the wrong approach to handling these issues- it should be more about educating and not shaming people…generally because they don't understand and need the education. He seems himself as a bridge for these communities because of his unique position in each of these spaces.

Tensions have also risen in his family because of his social justice views and their lack of understanding of each other's views. They have open discussions about things as a family, but it usually ends in a dead end.

His family is also very tradition and very conservative Vietnamese- this is problematic considering his queer identity. His mom encouraged him to see a psychologist when he came out to her in high school. She didn't understand the difference between queer and trans identities and thought he wanted a sex change. They don't understand each other's views.

Comparing expectations
47. pre-college friends very relaxed about school, values didn't match because he was very motivated and invested in a lot of organizations, not in contact with a lot of them
48. strong sense of personal ethics and morals

Assessing college experience
49. struggle starting BME premed and juggling community life but a little easier since switched majors, consistent personal obstacles- dealing with rejection
50. 12 auditions to get on first dance team
51. 3rd year when switched major- view that you have to work hard for what you want, self-worth and self-confidence issues because things come easily to other people

52. “fake it til I make it”, everyone has personal struggles, tries to be proactive and engaging if wants something
53. taught and instilled by parents as immigrants- work for what you want, be grateful for what you do have
54. goals to be in greek musical before graduate, finish double major
55. studied abroad in England for one summer- fun and learned a lot

College has been a struggle for Henry because of the major he started with and trying to balance his commitments to the community. However, this was easier to balance when he switched majors.

In 3rd year when he switched majors, that’s when he developed the view that you have to work hard for what you want but be proactive and engaging. Parents instilled hard work in him as immigrants.

Personal obstacles- dealing with rejection, self-worth, self-confidence

Assessing academic progress
56. excelled in HS so getting 1.98 in first quarter was rough, struggling to bring up since
57. balancing academics and community interests tough- prioritizing what matters more, chooses contributing to community over classes, proud of himself and wouldn’t change that in most of his involvements
58. wishes he didn’t enter pre-med, academic probation all of first year, struggling to get up to 3.0, been on Dean’s Honors Lit last few quarters

Leaving university
59. afraid of being kicked out but never considered leaving during this time, became motivator for self and others

Henry was on academic probation his entire first year of college because of his BME classes and he was afraid of being kicked out of the university. This was really rough for him because he had excelled in high school. He also struggled to balance his academics and his community interests during this time, finding that he would choose his community work over his academics. Doesn’t regret this and is proud of the work he’s done. Since switching, he’s been progressing in academics and has been on the Dean’s list the last few quarters.

Support
Academic
60. self, never went to anyone, saw as personal responsibility
61. attended peer tutor sessions for BME but didn’t find as helpful, and conflicted with schedule
Social
62. proactive in seeking out what he’s interested in, very social person
63. has more shallow friendships than close friends, usually 1 person from each org that he really connects to, but can turn to others with issues if need to
Emotional

64. self, very self-reliant and independent

Financial

65. no financial aid, all parents, working at bookstore for experience and starbucks prior

Stay on track

66. second sister- can talk to her about anything

***Experience as commuter student**

67. hates being commuter student, can't be more independent because of finances, been pushing parents for more freedom- used to be picked up and dropped off with 10pm curfew, started driving 2nd year and pushing time for "internships"
68. many friends live on campus and have connections to each other, lacked "the freshman experience", had made budget for parents but they said no to dorming, parents were against taking loans for undergrad, will need loans for grad school
69. really lacking- difficult to network and create community so bad to be a "go getter"
70. more active and driven than when first started because clear on what he wants out of this experience

Henry hates being a commuter student because he feels like he's missed out on a lot of experiences and connections with people. His parents were very strict when he first started—since he didn't drive he had to be picked up and dropped off and he had a curfew of 10pm. However, he started driving his sophomore year and began pushing his time back by saying he had different "internships", which meant org events.

*Much of this is financial. Since his parents are funding his undergraduate, he wasn't allowed to dorm even after presenting his parents with a budget. They also did not want him to take out loans since his sister didn't have to either. However, they say he will have to take out loans for his graduate degree. *A lot of parental control due to finances.*

Difficulties

71. "social justice police"- APSA organization officers, creating hostile spaces and distancing members

Leaving university

72. considered it this past fall because he ran into financial struggle with how much dad would provide vs. parking, books, food, etc./ maybe since don't really need degree for aspirations/ $ could go to brother's college education (was trying to be practical)
73. discussed with parents but parents refused, so dropped Public Health Science double major which parents didn't like (books too expensive), pacified when added Social Policy-Public Service major

Henry said he seriously considered dropping out of school in the past fall because he ran into financial difficulties. His dad was going to allow him $300 for parking, books, etc. but that wouldn't cover what would cost close to $800. Thinking he was being practical- he remembered that he didn't need the college degree for his goals and his younger brother

would also need his college education covered so the money should be saved for his brother. His parents refused to let him. Instead, Henry decided to drop the Public Health Science double major because the cost of books were too expensive—his parents didn't like this because it wouldn't have given him a B.S. but they were pacified when he added the Social Policy-Public Service major.

Clubs/organizations
74. involved with Korean American Student Association (KASA) through dance team and participated in Korean Culture Night/ started Japanese drumming and involved with Japan Am club/ connected to Chinese Association Dance Crew
75. but then mom asks why not Viet people? → checked out VSA, 1st meeting was bad experience but tried again, has become more political and social, has dance team
76. involved in Filipino club because tried out for dance team and made a lot of friends 1st year so just stayed
77. involvement in so many orgs provided a lot of understanding about how they run- beneficial for PR goals

Korean American Student Association, Japanese American club, Chinese Association Dance Crew, VSA, Filipino club

SEA/Vietnamese students
(not sufficient number of either)
78. when considered SEA, only thought of Viet/other clubs are so small/ outside of club spaces, don't see much
79. identifies with Vietnamese culture mostly through food and language—not much Viet food on campus and not a lot of students speak Vietnamese

Purposely seek SEA/Viet friends
80. not just SEA but also East Asian, resonate with because of cultural similarities and similar struggles
81. has white friends, but don't resonate with them in same as AsAm friends
82. identifies more as API/AAPI than Southeast Asian, never considered separate from East Asian

Henry identifies himself as AAPI rather than Southeast Asian because he's never considered it different from East Asian- because of the cultural similarities and similar struggles.

**I also wonder if this is related to the fact that later he says that he doesn't think his SEA identity is valued because people just consider him AAPI.*

Opportunities to express cultural heritage
83. food and language is how he mainly identifies with culture and don't see much on campus/ family practices core traditions but considers a lot outdated

SEA identity
84. no, because identity is usually grouped as AAPI

Courses that reflect cultural heritage
85. no longer focusing on cultural courses but would want to take a class on Vietnamese history because doesn't understand it too well- needs details/ interested in class on Viet culture and folktales

Incidents of racism/racial microaggressions
86. not necessarily targeted at him or his community but racial issues and sexual issues that many don't recognize, sees through his social justice lens

Campus racial climate
87. not "pleased" with crc, needs to move towards more education so greater understanding
88. microaggressions happen all the time

Henry is not pleased with the campus racial climate and thinks the campus needs to provide more education on these issues.

Campus diversity
89. thinks campus relatively diverse and LGBTQ friendly and vegan/gluten-free friendly—relatively progressive
90. would like to see more queer community, but think conflicts with city's conservative nature- fears
91. doesn't think university values diverse members as much as he would like- difficult finding AsAm or diverse professors in social sciences and humanities

University's role
92. needs to approve of affirmative action- not quotas but recognize our oppressive system
93. need to change multicultural GE requirement- ethnic studies series because one quarter is not enough
94. wants to challenge students and communities to think about what it means to be diverse

Advocates for affirmative action and expanding ethnic studies requirement.

Sense of belonging
95. own motivations very clear to him and don't think a lot feel the same, wants people more engaged on campus and interested in what their education looks like (like he has seen at other campuses), thinks high commuter population contributes to this
96. social justice community also building into hostile point- not comfortable, feels more welcome on other campuses

Henry doesn't feel a sense of belonging on campus because he feels that his motivations are very different from a lot of students at [Redwood University]—he is engaged on campus and

in his community and wishes his fellow students felt the same and were more invested in shaping their education.

Also, the social justice community at [Redwood University] has built up to a very hostile climate, so he doesn't feel comfortable on campus and feels more welcome at other campuses.

Henry is a very proactive person/student and appears very independent in creating action to work towards his goals/discovering his goals…-seeing counselors, attending student activism conferences, getting involved in campus organizations, working in community, etc.

However, it also looks like the structure of his life is also heavily influenced/almost controlled by his parents—attending UC, his major coming into college, his social life (driving, curfew), financial control

Involvement in community work/volunteering from a young age seems to have really shaped his life/aspirations (mom's influence)

Appendix G

Model of Southeast Asian American Student Persistence